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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE MUMMY'S HEAD

With one hand clutching the throat of the creature, whose venomous claws were tearing at his coat sleeves, Nick flung the cat to the floor.

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The Mummy's Head;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S EGYPTIAN MYSTERY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BROWN BAG.

It was nearly 11 p. m. The night was warm, and Nick Carter, having finished an unusually busy day, had gone upstairs to his study, thrown aside his coat and settled himself down for a quiet half hour with the afternoon papers.

He had not been five minutes in his easy-chair before Joseph presented himself.

"Well?" queried Nick, looking over the top of his paper at Joseph.

The latter was standing just inside the door, his hand still on the knob, his manner hesitating.

"There's a man in the reception room, sir, and I can't quite make him out," said Joseph. "He's a stranger—at least, I have never seen him here before—and he asks for an immediate interview with you."

"Any name?"

"He said you wouldn't know him if he gave a name. He's not the sort to have a visiting card, although he looks respectable enough, but a little threadbare. He carries a brown bag, rather shabby now but once a high-class and expensive bag."

"Then he is shabby genteel, bag and all?" asked Nick, with a twinkle.

"It's the way he acts, sir," explained Joseph. "He is in a highly nervous condition. When I opened the door he staggered against me and I had to help him into the reception room. He was trembling like a leaf. I lowered him into a chair, and he dropped the bag and kicked it away from him, then he pulled it back and put his feet on each side of it. After that he took a bottle from his pocket and swallowed some of its contents. He said it was a stimulant."

"If the stimulant has braced him sufficiently, you might show him up here, bag and all."

Joseph withdrew and presently returned, ushering the caller. The man seemed rather more composed, for he followed unaided, but he was still pale, and, it was evident, in a highly wrought up condition.

Nick motioned him to a chair and laid aside the paper.

"Mr. Carter, Mr. Nicholas Carter?" the man asked, his voice husky and tremulous.

"Yes."

The caller waited until the door had closed upon Joseph.

"My name's Blenkyn, Darrel Blenkyn, Mr. Carter," said he. "The name doesn't mean anything to you, of course, and that's why I didn't send it up."

The motions with the brown bag, which Joseph had described as taking place in the reception room, were now taking place in the study.

That is, Mr. Darrel Blenkyn, seized with momentary distaste for the brown bag, thrust it violently from him with his feet; yet hardly had he pushed it away before he became morbidly eager to secure it again, reached for it with his hands, and nervously took it upon his knees.

He wanted the bag, and he didn't want it; he couldn't bear to have it with him, and he couldn't bear to have it out of his sight. It was an odd condition of mind for a man to be in, and caused the detective's wonder to circle around the satchel.

The shabby gentility of Darrel Blenkyn impressed Nick Carter just as it had impressed Joseph. His clothing was of good quality, but had worn shiny in places. Many attempts at removing grease spots were in evidence. The trousers had been recently pressed.

Mr. Blenkyn's face was thin, and his hair was combed neatly over a bald spot. Probably he was forty odd.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Blenkyn?" inquired Nick.

"I—I don't know that you can do anything for me, Mr. Carter," was the surprising answer. "I don't know that anybody can do anything. In fact, I don't know as there's anything to be done."

"In that case," returned Nick crisply, "perhaps it would be well for us not to take up any more of each other's time."

Blenkyn's hand shot up restrainingly.

"I don't mean just that, Mr. Carter," said he, with a harassed air. "I'm in such a nervous condition that I don't know hardly what I do mean."

One shaking hand dipped into the breast pocket of his coat and brought out a small flask. Blenkyn gulped down a little of the flask's contents.

Blenkyn's appearance did not indicate that he was a drinking man. It was clear, therefore, that he carried the flask for medicinal purposes.

"Perhaps," said the detective, "you had better relieve your mind as concisely and clearly as possible and leave me to decide whether or not I can do anything for you."

"I will," answered Blenkyn, "but my wits are in such an unsatisfactory condition I hardly know where to begin."

"I'll question you and point the way. Your name is Darrel Blenkyn, and you live some distance from New York——"

The other gave a fleeting smile.

"You guessed that from the satchel?" he returned.

"No, from the punched ticket in the band of your hat. If I was 'guessing' on the score of the satchel I should say that you were from Chicago. But that would be incorrect. The satchel came from Chicago, but it came by express. The pasted label tells that. The satchel has lain in the express office for some time. You have not been in the city many hours. If you had, some one would have told you, or you would yourself have discovered, the punched slip in your hat band and have removed it. But enough of this, and now for the questioning. Where is your home, Mr. Blenkyn?"

"Great Barrington, Massachusetts."

"When did you come down from Great Barrington?"

"I got here at one o'clock this afternoon."

"You came on business?"

"That is correct. My business carries me to different places—mostly to the large cities."

"And that business is——"

"It's a peculiar business, Mr. Carter. Perfectly legitimate," he went on hastily, "but out of the ordinary. When packages shipped by express have lain a long time unclaimed in the express offices, they are advertised and sold at auction."

"I know about that."

"I watch for these sales, attend them, and bid in any likely packages which my experience tells me may prove valuable. It's more or less of a lottery, Mr. Carter, until one learns how to size up the really valuable packages. I have reached the point where the work is less of a lottery for me than it used to be, but still I draw a good many blanks, and they are sometimes expensive."

That the prizes did not much more than offset the "blanks" was mutely testified to by Darrel Blenkyn's appearance. He had a struggle to make "both ends meet," and that was plain.

"Once," he said, "I secured a consignment of real tortoise-shell combs. I paid two dollars for the consignment and sold the combs for more than two hundred dollars. That——"

"Let us confine ourselves to the matter in hand, Mr. Blenkyn."

"I just wanted to——"

"You came down from Great Barrington, reached New York at one o'clock, attended an auction and bought that satchel."

"That is correct, Mr. Carter."

"Did you buy anything else?"

"I bid on a few things, but the bidding ran up to a point that was beyond my purse. I am partial to satchels and trunks. Nearly always they contain property of value."

"After you secured the brown bag, what then?"

"That was about half-past five this afternoon, Mr. Carter. The bidding lasted until six. No one else tried to get the brown bag. My first bid of a dollar secured it. Of course, I considered it a great bargain, even if it had been empty. The bag could be dressed over, the metalwork scoured, and I figured that I could sell it, secondhand, for a good——"

"It was the contents of the bag, I presume, that excited your nervousness and apprehension?"

A look of slow horror ran through Blenkyn's thin face, and he pushed the bag from him, toward the detective.

"Yes," he mumbled, drawing a hand across his fore-

head, "it was what the bag contained that startled me. I am an honest man, Mr. Carter. To my knowledge, I have never, even unconsciously, committed a lawless act in my life."

"Are there burglar's tools in that bag, Mr. Blenkyn?" smiled Nick.

"No," brightened Blenkyn, "although I did secure a burglar's kit once. I turned it over to the police and it resulted in the capture of a noted safe cracker, wanted for a most daring crime. That was in Cincinnati, two years ago."

"Do you think the contents of this satchel"—here Nick reached for the satchel and lifted it to his desk—"points to the commission of a crime?"

"I am sure of it," said Blenkyn vehemently, "and that is why I came to you here. A Doctor Seidl, who lives near Monterey, in the Berkshires, told me about you some time ago. I remembered the name and the address, and that is why I came to you to-night instead of going directly to police headquarters."

The lock of the satchel had been broken, but carefully, and in such a way as not to mar the brown bag more than necessary.

"I took the satchel to my hotel, and after supper I broke the lock, and—and almost fainted at what I found. But look for yourself, Mr. Carter!"

The detective opened the clips at each end of the satchel, opened the grip and took out an object wrapped in a newspaper. Laying the object on the desk beside the bag, Nick began to unroll it.

Darrel Blenkyn sat back in his chair with whitening lips and watched the detective with a wild fear in his eyes.

The detectve muttered an exclamation as the paper gave up its contents.

"A head, a human head!" gurgled Blenkyn.

"But it's several thousand years old," said Nick. "It's a mummy's head, Mr. Blenkyn."

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY.

Darrel Blenkyn took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

"That's enough, don't you think," said he, "to startle a man?"

"Why, yes, enough to startle him but not enough to cause any particular apprehension. You are in no particular danger from the law because the satchel and its contents have fallen innocently into your hands."

"I suppose not. As I told you, however, I almost swooned when that grisly thing was revealed to me, in my room at the hotel. At first, you understand, I believed it pointed to some crime, recently committed."

"Not at all."

"That was my first impression. Later, I decided that the thing must be the head of a mummy, and I somewhat recovered my poise. Then something more occurred to unsettle me."

Again Darrel Blenkyn used the handkerchief, running it over his forehead and around under his collar.

"What occurred?" queried Nick tersely.

"I was followed from the auction room in Twenty-third Street to the hotel. A red-faced man with mutton-chop whiskers followed me. He was stout and short, and looked as though he might be a sailor. But I did not think he was following me, Mr. Carter. I believed that only chance had carried him to the auction room, that only chance took him away from the auction room a little after six when I left, and only chance that seated him at the same table in the hotel café where I ate my supper. But I knew, while I was examining that mummy's head in my room, that the red-faced man had trailed me."

"What made you certain of that?"

"Well, I dropped the head on the bed, where I had put the brown bag, and fell back against the wall with my hands over my face. After I had recovered my nerve a little, I looked around a little wildly, I presume, and—and——"

Darrel Blenkyn shivered.

"And what?" urged the detective.

"Why, my eyes chanced to wander to the transom over my room door, and I saw there the red face of the man who had been in the auction room, and who had sat with me at the table in the café."

"Ah!"

"He was watching me."

"Undoubtedly. Did you at once open the door and demand to know why he was watching you?"

"I was not in a condition to do anything as sensible as that. Horror had gripped me, and deadened my faculties. While I stared at the transom, like one fascinated, the red face suddenly vanished. A minute, perhaps two minutes, later, I opened the door, but the man had left. There was a chair in front of the door, so he must have stood on the chair in order to bring his face to a level with the transom. He got away in such a hurry he had not time to remove the chair."

"I see," nodded Nick. "What did you do then?"

"I withdrew inside my room and locked the door. It was foolish, I suppose, but that is what I did. I am of a particularly nervous temperament and was tremendously affected."

"Very likely."

"It was nearly ten o'clock, Mr. Carter, when I made up my mind that I would bring the brown bag and its contents to you. I—I wrapped the head up in the newspaper——"

"The same newspaper in which it was wrapped when you opened the satchel?"

"Yes, the same newspaper, Mr. Carter."

"The fact is important, and I want you to be sure."

"I am sure. There was no other paper handy."

"Very good. There was nothing else wrapped up

with the head, nothing which, possibly by inadvertence, you left in the room?"

"Not a thing."

"You were agitated, you know, and it was quite possible for you to overlook something."

"I was not so agitated, Mr. Carter, that I overlooked that point."

"Go on, Mr. Blenkyn."

"It was almost ten o'clock, then, when I cautiously left my room at the hotel——"

"What hotel was it?"

Blenkyn gave the name of a hotel near Grand Central Station, a moderately priced hostelry much frequented by farmers and others of modest means who came to visit the metropolis.

"I passed hurriedly out at the ladies' entrance of the hotel," went on Blenkyn, "and stepped to the edge of the walk to hail a hansom. Hardly had I climbed into the cab, and before I could close the doors, when a man called loudly and leaped in beside me. It—it was the red-faced man, Mr. Carter!"

"What did he try to do?"

"He tried to grab the satchel. The walk in front of the ladies' entrance was almost deserted, and only the cab driver and myself witnessed the attack; the driver, of course, could not see what was going on in the cab, being on the seat behind. Well, I kept hold of the bag and rolled out the other side of the hansom. The vehicle was moving, and I got rather a bad fall. The red-faced man tripped and took a header after me, and before he got to his feet I had run back into the hotel again."

"I see," said Nick. "Did you go up to your room again and lock yourself in?"

"I was tempted to," and the handkerchief again passed over Blenkyn's forehead, "but, on second thought, I hurried through the lobby of the hotel and out upon another street. There was a taxi handy, and I jumped into it and had the driver bring me here.

"And this," finished Darrel Blenkyn, "is all I have to tell. My encounter with the red-faced man, taken in conjunction with that gruesome thing I found in the brown bag, accounts for my nervous collapse. On my way here, I stopped at a drug store and bought a little something to brace myself up. What do you think of the affair?"

"There may be something of importance at the back of it, or there may be nothing," answered Nick.

"I have a feeling that some great crime has been committed," declared Blenkyn.

"That 'feeling' may be merely the result of your agitated state of mind following events of the afternoon and evening."

"I won't deny that, of course."

"Are you going to be long in the city, Mr. Blenkyn?"

"I had thought of going back home to-morrow. Staying in New York is rather expensive. Still, I can wait in town a day or two if you think it necessary."

"Wait until to-morrow afternoon before going back to Great Barrington. You will hear from me if anything develops that seems to be worth while. If you do not hear from me, return to the Berkshire Hills and forget what, it seems, has been to you a very unpleasant experience."

"If that red-faced man continues to follow me, what shall I do?"

"You're done with him. He wanted the satchel, and I had better keep it. How much do you want for the brown bag and its contents, Mr. Blenkyn?"

"Take it!" returned Blenkyn, with huge relief. "Take it and welcome, Mr. Carter. I am more than glad to get rid of it."

Nick took a silver dollar from his pocket and handed it to Blenkyn.

"That will repay you for your outlay," said he, "and the bag and contents now belong to me—for purposes of investigation. That will be all, I think, Mr. Blenkyn."

"I hope you will unravel the mystery, Mr. Carter," remarked Blenkyn, getting to his feet and pocketing the coin.

"If there is a mystery worth while, I hope so."

Nick conducted his caller personally downstairs and to the front door. There was a taxi waiting in front.

"I feel a hundred per cent. better," said Blenkyn, as he bade the detective good night and hurried down the steps.

From a window, a moment later, Nick saw the taxi get under way and move along the street.

Hardly had it vanished when a hansom drove up and halted at the curb.

A man got out of it and stood for a moment in the gleam of the cab light.

He was short, heavy-set, and had a fringe of whiskers around his broad face and under his jaws and chin.

"Blenkyn told the truth," thought Nick grimly. "There's the man who followed him from the auction room to the hotel. Very likely he used the hansom cab to trail the taxi."

From the darkened room the detective continued to watch the red-faced individual.

The man moved across the walk and to the foot of the steps.

"A sailor," mused Nick; "that roll in his gait comes from much walking over a heaving deck. Ah, he's fixing the location of the house in his mind—he's looking for the number."

After two or three minutes of scrutiny, the red-faced man turned slowly and walked back to the cab. He gave some instructions to the driver.

Nick, meanwhile, had called Joseph.

"Is Patsy in the house?" he asked.

"He and Chick are both here," was the answer.

"Call Patsy at once."

Before the hansom had driven away, Patsy was at Nick's side.

"What is it, chief?" he asked.

"Follow that cab, Patsy," answered the detective, pointing from the window. "Get the number; if possible, find where the fare is taken, his name, why he

stopped and looked the house over—in short, discover anything you can that concerns him."

Patsy had not much time—but he did not need much. He was ready for the street when he answered his chief's summons. The cab was hardly well away before the door opened and Patsy emerged from the house.

"Send Chick to my study, Joseph," said Nick, as he turned from the window.

CHAPTER III.

THE "DELTA" SCAR.

"Hello, Nick," said Chickering Carter, the detective's first assistant, coming into the study. "Joseph just told me you wanted me, and—— Great Scott!"

Coming up behind Nick, and looking over his shoulder, Chick received a jolt. The detective glanced up and laughed.

"Whew!" murmured Chick. "Are you holding a post-mortem?"

"You might call it that," said Nick.

"When I first saw the thing I thought you had tackled a homicide case, but I see now that that's a fragment of a mummy."

"The circumstances that brought this into my hands are rather interesting. Sit down, Chick, and I'll run over them."

While Nick was talking, the mummy's head lay on the wrinkled newspaper in front of him. Chick, listening intently to his chief, kept his eyes on the head.

"You don't think Darrel Blenkyn is playing any dodge on his own account?" asked Chick, when the explaining was done.

"No. The appearance of the red-faced man in front of the house corroborates Blenkyn; and we'll know more about that red-faced man when Patsy reports. Just now it's the head itself that commands my attention."

There was a black and ancient-looking bandage around the throat of the relic, and this swathing crossed at the back of the head and came forward over the ears and temples. The entire face and most of the forehead, however, had no covering. The swarthy skin, like dried parchment, clung to the high cheek bones, and the withered eyelids were closed. Some of the teeth could be seen and were in a remarkable state of preservation. Taken all in all, however, the head was not a pleasant thing to look at.

"Look at this, Chick," and the detective bowed forward and touched the forehead of the mummy.

His finger rested under the point where the two ends of the bandage joined, forming a "V" inverted over the eyes.

"That looks like a scar," observed Chick, "a triangular scar."

"It is more like an indentation. A simple scar, it seems to me, could not have survived the process of embalming and the lapse of centuries since the embalming was done."

The triangle's base almost reached the eyebrows, and its point must have been near the hair line.

"A peculiar thing," vouchsafed Chick.

"So it is," said Nick. "It was that mark that interested me in the case. I should hardly have bothered with the matter at all, had I not seen that V-shaped indentation."

"What about it?"

"Just a second."

Nick got up and went into the record room. He was gone only a few minutes and returned with a newspaper clipping.

"This clipping was filed so recently," he explained, as he resumed his seat, "that the substance of it was still quite fresh in my mind. This was printed in a New York paper less than a week ago," and, with that, Nick read the clipping aloud:

"'Dead for Centuries. Scientists Hold a Post-Mortem on the Four-thoustand-year-old Body of a Queen.

"'The first consignment of Egyptian antiquities resulting from the excavations made in the last year under direction of the Oriental Exploration and Research Society was shown yesterday in the rooms of the Society in Sixth Avenue. The Lady of Senbtes, the star of the discoveries, was not present, however, and Herr Liedermann, who seems to be the whole society, and who brought the antiquities from Egypt to New York, reported that she would not be in a condition to appear for several days yet.

"'In the Lady of Senbtes, Herr Liedermann has been assured that his society has obtained one of the oldest, if not the oldest, mummies that has been discovered so far. When Herr Liedermann found her tomb and opened it, he called in Doctor Gray-Newcomb, professor of anatomy at the Cairo School of Medicine, who made an interesting study and report showing just who the lady was in the twelfth dynasty, about four thousand years ago.

"'Doctor Gray-Newcomb found that the lady was about fifty years old at the time of her death. She was slender. Her face was small, infantile, in fact, the eyes were large and round, the nose well proportioned, being neither aquiline nor flat, and her teeth were remarkably well preserved.

"'A peculiar feature in connection with the head was a mark above the eyes which puzzled Doctor Gray-Newcomb, and which he described as a delta scar. Another peculiar feature of the case was that the head of the mummy, when found, was severed from the shoulders.

"'The Lady of Senbtes was of high caste. On her breast lay a dagger in a gold-capped sheath of wood. In her hair was a weave of golden filigree work with many gold rosettes. And in the coffin with the mummy was the ceremonial whip of Senbtes, a whip swung—ceremonially—by those in high authority.'"

Nick laid aside the clipping and sat back in his chair, fixing speculative eyes on Chick.

"You think this mummy's head is the head of the Lady of Senbtes, Nick?" Chick asked.

"That was my first offhand supposition," Nick answered, "and it interested me. There are circumstances, however, that disprove that supposition, and they interest me even more."

"Before the express companies can auction off unclaimed packages," said Chick, "they have to be kept a certain length of time."

"Precisely—several months at least."

"So, if that clipping was taken from a paper less than a week old, and at a time when the Lady of Senbtes was apparently all together in the museum of Herr Liedermann, it could hardly refer to a mummy's head that has been lying for months in some storeroom."

"Very good, Chick. So far as I know, however, that 'delta scar' is absolutely unique. No other mummy has been found with it."

"This head, too, seems to answer the description of the head of the Lady of Senbtes!"

"And yet, this cannot be the head of Herr Liedermann's mummy. The evidence, as you have just outlined it, disproves that. The slip pasted on the brown grip shows that the satchel was sent from Chicago more than a year ago, consigned to Jan or James—the first name is a little hard to read—Kjellander, four hundred and two and one-half Fifty-eighth Street. The name of the consignor is not given, nor are there any initials painted on the bag."

"The address must have been wrong," said Chick, "or the satchel would have been delivered."

"The consignee, for some reason, may have been afraid to receive the satchel."

"The consignee, Jan Kjellander, is the red-faced man? The chap that followed Blenkyn evidently wanted the brown bag. Furthermore, he was at the auction and did not even bid on it."

"The red-faced man may be Kjellander, or he may be somebody else. Possibly the address is all a fake, and that it was the intention of the man who forwarded the grip from Chicago that it should ultimately go to the auction room."

"Well," laughed Chick, "it's not much of a case, Nick. There doesn't seem to be anything in it, apart from the mystery."

"It's the mystery that holds me; and, on the contrary, I think it's a good deal of a case. I have already sent Patsy on the trail of the red-faced man, and to-morrow morning I believe, if you have nothing more important on hand, I will have you pry a little into the Oriental Exploration and Research Society. Herr Liedermann will probably prove a very interesting person to talk with."

Nick leaned forward, preparatory to rewrapping the head in the newspaper. While he was at work he evidently made a discovery, for he dropped back in his chair and cast a humorous look at his assistant.

"What now?" asked Chick.

"We'll have to go back to first principles," answered Nick, "to the very A, B, C of sleuthing. That newspaper in which the head was wrapped was, according to Darrel Blenkyn, the identical newspaper he found around the head when he broke the lock and first opened the satchel."

"Well?"

"That newspaper is dated the third of the month. This is the fifth."

A look of amazement crossed the face of Chick.

"In other words——"

"In other words," continued Nick, "while that brown bag must have been in the express company's storeroom for several months, the mummy's head has only been in the bag for two days!"

"Well! How do you account for that?"

"Darrel Blenkyn was absolutely certain that the newspaper is the same that he found around the head when the satchel was first opened. It strikes me, Chick, that the head must have been put in the satchel after the satchel was taken to the auction room."

"Or while on the way from the express company's storeroom to the place where the auction was held."

"And it follows that this may be the head of the Lady of Senbtes, after all."

"Right! But why all this cross play to secure such a relic by this red-faced person? If the man that had the thing wanted to give it to the other man, why didn't he meet him in some safe place and hand it over?"

"All that helps to comprise the mystery, Chick."

"There must be something about that head that's intrinsically valuable."

"It is evidently not the 'delta scar' that makes the relic valuable. Two men in this city seem to be bent on passing the head from one to the other with a great deal of unnecessary caution. The fact that they made use of the satchel proves their ulterior, perhaps their criminal, purposes. The red-faced man has the appearance of being a rough and ready sailor, and not at all such a person as would make use of such round-about claptrap."

"He may not be a sailor, Nick."

"True. I understand that perfectly. He wanted the satchel and was in the auction room when it was knocked down to Blenkyn. After Blenkyn got it, he wanted it. He did not try to purchase it from Blenkyn, but attempted to take it by force. Blenkyn got away from him with the bag, and the red-faced man followed him here, watched and saw him leave without the bag, then paused to make a note of the house so he could find it again. We'll hear from that fellow, Chick. Patsy, when he reports, will no doubt let in a little light on what the red-faced man is trying to do. Until then——"

The detective paused abruptly. While talking, he had resumed his examination of the relic, giving it rather a more careful survey than he had yet done.

Bending closer to the neck bandage, he lifted the

stiffened cloth a little, and, with thumb and forefinger, drew out a crumpled oblong slip of white paper.

"That's a find!" exclaimed Chick.

"A most unexpected find," answered Nick. "Let's see what we can make of it."

CHAPTER IV.

INTERESTING DEVELOPMENTS

The slip contained a neatly written message, curt and peremptory:

"Madison Square—midnight—6th—south of fountain. Meet me. You haven't found what you want, and you'll not get it till you come across with more."

Chick whistled.

"It's that message the red-faced man wanted, Nick," said he.

"I think not," mused the detective. "The message itself rather indicates that it takes the place of something else. 'You haven't found what you want.' In other words, you find this slip of paper instead of what you expected to find, and you'll have to meet me in Madison Squire at midnight to-morrow night before you get the thing you thought would be here."

"The foolishness of this business seems to grow, the deeper we get into it."

"How?"

"Well, in some manner that mummy's head was slipped into the brown bag on the third——"

"Probably on the fourth, Chick. The newspaper in which the relic is wrapped is a night 'extra.' I should say the relic went into the brown bag either yesterday or the forenoon of to-day, before the auction."

"That's immaterial to the point I want to make, Nick. The thing the red-faced man wanted was in the bag with the head. The auction was merely a means for the red-faced man to get the bag and its contents. He went to the auction to bid on the bag when it was put up. But he didn't bid. On the contrary, he trailed Darrel Blenkyn and tried to grab the bag. Why was that?"

"This is a criminal case. It is quite possible the red-faced man thought he was watched, and was afraid to bid. He preferred to secure the bag from the one who was successful in getting it at the auction. But here's another point."

"Well?"

"The red-faced man didn't try to secure the bag until he had looked through the transom of Blenkyn's room and made sure of its contents. When he saw the mummy's head he was perhaps more eager to get the bag and its contents than he was in the auction room."

The detective turned over the relic and gave lengthened attention to the place under the bandage from which he had drawn the slip of paper.

"Something else has been under this strip of discolored cloth, Chick," said he. "The bandage is stiff and tightly drawn, and the object, whatever it was, has left a faint outline of its form. It was an oblong square with rounded corners, and thin. When it was withdrawn, it left a sort of pocket into which that piece of paper was slipped."

"A bit of loot?"

"Unquestionably; and a very valuable bit of loot to call for all this caution in its transfer, and all this intricate scheming."

"More than one man is concerned, Nick; possibly more than two. The red-faced man is at one end of the line, while the fellow who did the stealing is at the other."

"And there may be another crook in between. Right. Such a conspiracy points to important results. Two or three 'guns' are not going to all this trouble unless there is considerable profit in sight."

"The man who wrote that message, it is evident, is not satisfied with his share of the swag."

"That's my idea. Instead of passing the loot along to the red-faced man, the writer of the message removes the valuable object, and, in its place, puts the note telling the red-faced man to meet him in Madison Square at midnight to-morrow night and 'come across with more.'"

Nick laughed softly.

"This may turn out to be a case," he added, "of 'where thieves fall out then just men get their dues.'"

"It is also one of the queerest cases we have ever mixed up with," declared Chick. "We're hunting for a bit of loot that we know comparatively nothing about. The mummy's head itself may be valuable, but it isn't the main object of all this tangle."

"This fragment of the Lady of Senbtes is merely an aid to the crooks in their work. I believe, Chick, that I will cancel your engagement to call on Herr Liedermann to-morrow. I will call at the headquarters of the Oriental Exploration and Research Society myself."

"There is nothing pressing to claim my attention to-morrow, Nick. This case appeals to me and I'd like to do something to help work it out."

"I've got you down for a call at the auction room where this express stuff was sold. You'd better pick up Darrel Blenkyn at his hotel, in the morning, and have him go with you."

"What particular line of investigation am I to follow at the auction room?"

Before Nick could answer, the telephone bell buzzed its warning. It was nearly 1 a. m. and rather an untimely hour for a telephone call.

Nick picked up the receiver.

"Hello!" he called.

"Is this the office of Nicholas Carter?" came along the wire, so clear and distinct that Chick could hear it from where he was sitting.

"Who is this talking?"

Both the detective and his assistant had supposed that Patsy was calling up, either to report or to ask

for further instructions. But the voice, and the terms of the query, proved that the man at the other end of the wire was not the second assistant.

"You don't know me," went on the voice, "but I'm a detective and want to see you on important business. I merely called to see if I could get an interview with you at this hour."

"If it's important, then come along and I'll wait up for you."

"Thank you. Good-by."

Nick hung up the receiver and faced around in his chair.

"Another detective wants an interview with me on important business," said he.

"I heard what he said. Some one you were expecting, Nick?"

"No; and I am granting the interview on the chance that it may have something to do with this Oriental mystery. We'll see, later. Now, about the auction room. If, as seems possible, this fragment of the mummy was transferred to the brown bag at the auction room, your investigations there will centre around that point."

"I see."

"Look the place over. I am under the impression that express companies hold their own auctions of unclaimed goods, and that they keep parcels that cannot be delivered for a year, and dispose of them in March. This is June. A departure from the usual custom may mean something. Find out, if you can, what it does mean."

Chick nodded. Nick had just given him the name of Darrel Blenkyn's hotel when the door of the study opened and Patsy stepped hurriedly into the room.

"You're back early, Patsy," said Nick.

"Earlier than I expected, chief," was the reply, "but I have been on the go ever since I left here."

"What did you find out?"

"Nothing very definite. The hansom with the man I was to follow turned at the corner and went north for two blocks. The man got out at an all-night drug store, which was also a telephone pay station, and went into one of the telephone booths. He came out and got into the cab again, crossed over to Sixth Avenue and continued north."

"Well?"

"I picked up a taxi and we shadowed the hansom. Up around Fiftieth Street the hansom stopped in front of a building whose façade had square columns. It was the Egyptian Building."

"Ah!"

"The man I was following got out again and met a man on the steps of the building, at the door. The second man seemed to be waiting."

"Probably the red-faced man had called up the other one from the drug store."

"That was my impression, chief. It was plain the two met by appointment. They talked for five minutes, then the second man went back into the building and the other returned to the hansom."

"And then?"

"After that, the hansom returned south, and again halted at the drug store from which the red-faced man had telephoned the first time. But the hansom didn't wait. The man paid the driver and dismissed him."

"And after that?"

"More telephoning, chief. I had sent the taxi away and watched from the front while the fellow went into the telephone booth. When he came out, he headed for our street——"

An exclamation escaped Chick.

"That's the fellow that just telephoned you, Nick," said he; "the one who claimed to be a detective."

"No doubt," and a grim smile crossed Nick's face. "The red-faced man is coming here to see me, Patsy," he added, to his second assistant. "This Oriental mystery is getting a new twist. Be ready to answer the door, Chick—Joseph is in bed, by now. Take off your coat and vest and shoes, for you have just got up to attend the summons. Look at the man well when he comes. A knowledge of his appearance may come in handy, later. Step into the costume room, Patsy, and——"

The tinkle of the electric bell echoed faintly from below.

"There he is now," said Chick, and left the room.

Nick began carefully and quickly replacing the message where he had found it and wrapping the mummy's head in the newspaper. He had the package in the brown bag, and the brown bag closed and deposited in the record room, before Chick came upstairs with the caller.

The caller was indeed the red-faced man with the mutton-chop whiskers and the rolling gait of a seafarer.

But the man was not a sailor.

If his own word, as received over the telephone, was to be accepted, he was a detective, and his air of the sea had merely been assumed for purposes of his own.

CHAPTER V.

OFF ON A NEW TACK.

"Mr. Carter! By George, sir, it's a pleasure to meet you!" The caller was effusive and grabbed Nick's hand heartily. "As one of the lesser lights of our profession, it does me proud to strike hands with a master."

"Sit down," said Nick dryly.

The caller sat down. Nick's keen eyes, now that they could observe the man closely, detected the make-up. Naturally stout and round-faced, the addition merely of a fringe of beard and the assumption of a roll in his gait had made of the man a typical sea dog.

"This is a most ungodly hour to make a call, but I dare say that you yourself have not always been able to choose your own time for an interview. Eh?"

"The time of night," answered Nick, "suggests brevity."

"Exactly, and I'm going to get right down to brass tacks. First off, I want to tell you that my name's Hummer, Amos J. Hummer, detective."

"Private agency?"

"Exactly; private agency, Chicago; at present employed by Herr Liedermann, the old geezer that deals in embalmed Gyps, and things that have been dug up along B. C. some time. Great old sport, Liedermann, but he's up against it now."

"In what way, Mr. Hummer?"

The private-agency man showed a tendency to be verbose, which was not at all to Nick's liking.

"Why, on account of that mummy's head that—— But I guess you don't know; the thing has been kept out of the papers. To saw it off short, Mr. Carter, it's this way: The head of this particular mummy has a strange mark on its forehead. A highbrow in Chicago, who's wise to hieroglyphs and a few other fads that prevailed in the Land of the Nile, heard about the mummy with the mark and wired Liedermann to send the head to him for study. Liedermann's an obliging old seed, and he wrapped up the priceless relic, put it in an old brown bag he happened to have, wired a tag to the handle, put out his flag for an expressman, and cast the relic adrift. Right there is where Liedermann went lame."

"How?"

"The expressman that answered the call and receipted for the brown bag was a gun."

"How do you know?"

"Glor! Why, look here, Mr. Carter, that bag was receipted for on the first. It ought to have been in Chicago by the second, and, anyhow, by the third. It wasn't. It isn't there yet. Got a wire from the highbrow last night, and he said so. Inquiry at the express office—at all the express offices—reveals no record of any shipment to Professor Gunyon. Ergo, man who took the bag away from Liedermann was a crook. Natural inference, eh?"

"Yes."

"A blue cap, with a nickel-plated badge, don't make a crook an employee of the express company. But Liedermann didn't know. He's nearsighted and unsuspicious. Got fooled. Bag was one that belonged to a fellow who used to do cataloguing for Liedermann, fellow named Jan Kjellerman, who boarded up in the Fifties somewhere. It came to Jan by express, more than a year ago and——"

"Is this man, Kjellerman, working for Herr Liedermann now?"

"Not now, not since last summer. Went wrong or something. Anyhow, he quit his job between two days and hiked without waiting to take his personal goods and chattels along. The brown bag came in handy as a shipping case, so Liedermann used it."

"Did you come on from Chicago to find the mummy's head for Liedermann?"

"Not at all, believe me. I'm a lesser light, but I never hook up with small cases like that. I was in this town on business and dropped in to swap a little small talk with Liedermann. That was the third, the evening of the third. Morning of the fourth I got a telephone call at my hotel from Liedermann. He wanted me to come hotfoot to his place and give him some advice. I went. A call from a friend always claims yours truly."

"Liedermann had just learned that Professor Gunyon had not received the shipment?"

"Just. And no trace of it at the express offices. The old boy was in a taking, and no mistake. He wanted me to help him recover the piece of the mummy. Commercially, Mr. Carter, I don't suppose that mummy's head is worth a plugged copper; but to these wise ones, with a coco full of Egyptology, the fortunes of Rockybilt and Vandefeller combined couldn't have bought that mummy's right ear. Ain't it remarkable?"

"What did you do?"

"Do? What would you do if you were suddenly asked to go out and comb Greater New York for one brown bag, branded with an express label more than a year old consigning same to one Jan Kjellerman?"

"I should probably find it by looking for the gun that impersonated the express agent."

"Glor!" and Hummer beamed ecstatically at Nick. "Great minds do run in the same channel now and then, eh? That's exactly what I started out to do. The forenoon of the fifth—that would be to-day if to-night wasn't already to-morrow—I stood on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street when an express wagon went by piled with old trunks, bags, and parcels. And then and there——"

Hummer paused, gulped and seemed stricken with awe.

"Well?" queried Nick.

"Honest, now, do you believe in luck? Not the ordinary kind of luck, understand me, but the wide, happy smile of Dame Fortune when she suddenly bobs up in front of you and bats you over the head with her horn of plenty. Do you believe in that, Mr. Carter? Tell me."

"No."

"Neither did I, sir, up till that moment. Glor! Listen to this, now, and wonder. Mr. Carter, just as sure as I'm sitting here talking to you, on top of the heap in that express wagon was the brown bag! Fact! I saw it with my two eyes, saw it plain, and there wasn't any possibility of mistake."

Nick wanted to laugh. But he did not. On the contrary, he kept a straight face and even looked tremendously impressed.

"Most remarkable!" he exclaimed.

"Was I thunderstruck? Did I stand there gawping like a Jasper with his eyes on a gold brick? Oh, dear, I lack words to tell you how awful I felt. I followed the express wagon."

"Of course."

"And it unloaded itself in Twenty-third Street, in front of an auction house."

"Well?"

"The auction was that afternoon. I didn't go making inquiries of the express people as to why they had had no record of something they had presumably had in their hands for upwards of a year. No. I hung around till the brown bag was put up and sold. Then I followed the buyer. I shadowed him to a hotel, I followed him to his room, I got a chair and stood on it and looked through his transom."

Hummer swelled up and breathed hard while once more that look of awe played tag over his broad visage.

"And I saw," he went on huskily, "that brown bag open on a bed, the mummy's head beside it, and the purchaser thereof leaning against the wall, within one of being all in. That was sufficient. I faded from the transom and waited for the man who had bought the bag to show himself. He appeared at the ladies' entrance, hailed a hansom, and was in the cab before I could get hold of him. I jumped into the cab myself and grabbed at the bag. He jumped out. The cab was moving. I'm heavy and I fell after him. By the time I was up he was gone. The cabby said he went back into the hotel. I galloped around the corner, saw him come out the main entrance and hail a taxi. Then I jumped into the hansom, told the hansom to follow the taxi, and on my soul if we didn't come to your place. I kept a good offing with the hansom till the man came out. Then I had an attack of heart failure—he didn't bring the bag out with him."

Hummer paused.

"This is very interesting, Mr. Hummer," said Nick. "Please continue."

"I looked your place over, I took your number, and I found who it was lived here. I was overjoyed, but there was still work for me to do. I had the hansom take me to a telephone and I called up Liedermann, at the Egyptian Building. Liedermann wasn't there, but his clerk, Senner, was. Senner sleeps in the place—right in the room where the telephone is, in fact. Senner answered. I told him to meet me on the steps of the Egyptian Building in ten minutes. He did. I asked him if such a person as Darrel Blenkyn had ever had any dealings with Liedermann. You see, Mr. Carter, I was in doubt as to whether this Blenkyn, whose name I had secured from the hotel register, had purchased the brown bag with or without criminal intent. Senner said he knew of no such man, and he was acquainted with every one of Liedermann's friends and customers. I decided that Blenkyn was innocent, and came back here. Now, Mr. Carter, in two words: Have you got that brown bag?"

"I have," said Nick.

"With the mummy's head inside?"

"Yes."

"Glor, but that's a relief. Blenkyn left it here?"

"He did."

"Why?"

"He didn't know what else to do with it."

Hummer chuckled.

"Possibly he thought it pointed to some crime, eh?"

"Possibly. I was intending to try and find the owner."

"That was right, Mr. Carter, that was proper. There was nothing in it for you, but it showed a fine professional spirit. Have you examined the relic at all?"

"Not much, as yet."

"Would you have any objection to giving it to me so that I may return it to Liedermann, or would you rather return it yourself?"

"I am perfectly willing to give it to you, Mr. Hummer," said Nick, "after I call up the Oriental Exploration and Research Society's rooms and talk with Senner."

"Which is precisely the proper caper, Mr. Carter. You don't know me from Adam. Call up Senner. Ask him if it's right to give me the bag."

Nick hunted up the number and called up the office of the Oriental Research Society. A tremulous voice answered—a voice that did not seem to be exactly sure of itself. Yes, Mr. Hummer was a friend of Herr Liedermann, and it was all right to give him the brown bag.

Nick tossed the receiver upon the hook, went into the other room, brought out the bag and handed it to Hummer.

"There you are, Mr. Hummer," said he pleasantly, "and I am glad to have been of service."

Exultation flamed in Hummer's eyes for the fraction of a moment.

"I'll tell Liedermann about you, Mr. Carter," said he, grasping the bag and rising. "No doubt he'll send a check, a generous check."

"Never mind about the check, Mr. Hummer. The service was slight. Chick!"

The first assistant appeared yawning in the study door.

"Conduct Mr. Hummer to the street door, Chick," said Nick. "Good-by," he finished, clasping the detective's hand.

"By-bye," said Hummer, "and here's hoping we meet again, Mr. Carter."

While Chick and the caller were descending the stairs, Nick dropped into his chair and smothered a laugh.

"We shall certainly meet again, Mr. Hummer," he muttered. "At midnight of the sixth, south of the fountain in Madison Square. Yes, indeed, we shall meet."

CHAPTER VI.

AN ODD SITUATION.

The front of the Egyptian Building was modeled somewhat after the façade of the Temple of Karnak. There were eight floors, and Professor Liedermann's

Oriental Exploration and Research Society occupied the eighth.

An elevator whisked Nick Carter upward, about 10 in the morning of the day following his experience with the brown bag, and left him in a square hall fronting a door that bore the society's sign.

He opened the door and found himself in an anteroom. The room was small and square, and each wall was broken by an opening. Three of these openings were doors, and the fourth was a window.

Opposite the door by which Nick entered was a very broad door, and in the left-hand wall was a narrower one. A desk was shoved up in front of the window.

On the floor was an expensive rug. The half dozen chairs scattered around the anteroom were weird pieces and suggestive of the early Egyptians—or of the early Hottentots, Nick was undecided which.

A strange odor pervaded the room, musty and ancient, but rather spicy.

An angular man sat at the desk. His face was sallow and anæmic through too much housing between walls; his eyes were furtive, and his manner apologetic.

He was reading a paper when Nick came in. Laying aside the paper he turned hastily.

"Well, sir?" he interrogated.

Nick took his measure coolly. A telephone stood on the desk.

"Is Herr Liedermann in?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'd like to see him."

"Name, please?"

Nick handed out one of his professional cards. The clerk got up and took the card, glanced at it and gave an involuntary start. He flashed a sharp, inquisitive look at the detective. Nick, however, had turned to look out of the window.

"Just a minute," said the clerk, and passed from sight through the broad door.

"Senner, and no mistake," thought Nick; "and there's something on Senner's mind that shouldn't be there, by good rights."

The detective glided across the room and noiselessly turned the knob of the door in the left-hand wall. It yielded, opened, and gave him a view of a cubby-hole bedroom. The bed was unmade and the whole room more or less in disarray.

Nick closed the door as noiselessly as he had opened it.

"Tally one for Mr. Hummer," he thought. "Senner sleeps within reach and hearing of the phone, so it was not difficult to get him in the small hours of the morning."

Nick was trying to be comfortable in a most uncomfortable chair when the clerk returned.

"Will you step this way, please?" said he, holding open the wide door.

Nick crossed the threshold, and found that he had left New York and stepped into Egypt.

Two rows of pillars stretched away in front of him—stumpy, thickset pillars bearing hieroglyphics in red and black.

At the farther end of the colonnade was a red curtain embroidered with scarabei in gold.

The room was big, and high, and long. Light dropped from overhead, reflected by white-enameled walls. Contrasting weirdly with the lower part of the white walls was a dark frieze filled with human figures drawn with sharp angles and crudely colored.

There were glass cases arranged around the walls, filled no doubt with all the old flotsam and jetsam washed up out of the mysterious past—old gold, old pottery, old amulets, papyri—precious things from temples and tombs.

In panels, here and there, were monstrous pictures of the gods; and from shadowy corners peered replicas of the stone colossi of kings.

All this was "creepy," but the most creepy things in the exhibit were a score of mummies, in black cases. The cases stood upright between the pillars and Nick was led between them, then to the right past the red curtain and so to a corner framed about with two sarcophagi of alabaster.

Behind this gruesome railing sat a lean, medium-sized man with a snow-white mustache, spectacles, skull-cap, dressing gown, and slippers. He got up and came out of his den at the corner where the ends of the sarcophagi left space for an entrance. He had the detective's card in his hand.

"Mr. Nick Carter, is it?" he inquired, lowering his head to look at the detective over the tops of his spectacles.

"Yes," replied Nick.

"I am the professor. Will you not come in and sit?"

Nick followed him into the cramped little den and took a chair whose back was a carved sphinx and whose arms were bundles of carved asps. The Herr Professor's desk was a little conceit in the shape of a crocodile. The reptile stood on its tail, head erect and lower jaw swung down to form a writing stand.

The clerk had not returned to the anteroom. On the contrary, he had taken a feather duster and was brushing away at the mummy cases within hearing distance of the Herr Professor's corner.

"To what am I indebted for the pleasure, Mr. Carter?" said the Herr Professor.

Nick nodded toward the clerk.

"I wish to talk with you privately," said he.

"Senner!" called the Herr Professor. "You will dust at some other time. Return to the portal, Senner."

"Yes, sir."

Senner put away the feather duster. He left slowly and reluctantly. When the door had closed behind him the Herr Professor turned once more to Nick.

"Now?" said he.

"I am a detective, Professor Liedermann," said Nick, "and——"

Liedermann smiled broadly.

"I have heard of Nick Carter, and I am honored."

"Thank you. Would you mind answering a few questions for me?"

"It is some work you are engaged on, some work that deals with ancient peoples of the Nile or the Orient?"

"Yes."

"I will answer."

"You have a mummy called the Lady of Senbtes?"

"I have."

"May I see it?"

A look of pain crossed the face of the Herr Professor.

'I am grieved, Mr. Carter, but I cannot. The mummy is not presentable. It is incomplete."

"Ah, I see. The head is missing?"

"How you know that I cannot understand. But such is the case, Mr. Carter. The head was stamped with the delta scar, and I have sent it away to a friend."

"And your friend's name is——"

"The Herr Professor Rasmus Gunyon, of Chicago. He has written many books on Egypt, Mr. Carter, and is an authority."

"I see. When was the head sent to Chicago, professor?"

"On the first of the month."

"Will you tell me how it was packed for shipment?"

The Herr Professor was greatly surprised at the trend of the questioning, but he answered readily enough.

"In a leather hatbox, Mr. Carter. It was of sole leather and it made a safe case. We often lend and borrow for purposes of study. It was not unusual. I am a borrower of antiquities as well as a lender," and he smiled indulgently.

"Have you heard from Professor Rasmus Gunyon?"

"Not lately. He is too busy, I imagine, studying the delta scar. By and by he will write."

The telephone bell in the office had been ringing. The sound came faintly, but it came distinctly, through the closed door and to the far corner of the big room.

"That Senner!" exclaimed the Herr Professor, mildly irritated. "He is somewhere and not answering the phone. You will excuse me, Mr. Carter, while I go."

"Certainly," said Nick.

The professor got up and padded swiftly the length of the room. Hardly had the door of the anteroom closed behind him when a hair-raising screech echoed through the huge chamber. At the same moment something landed heavily on the detective's shoulders from behind.

He felt a dig of claws in his neck, started up like lightning, whirled and fastened his tense fingers in something soft and furry.

There was a second of fierce struggle, and then Nick flung himself against one of the sarcophagi, pressing the venomous and squirming animal against it with all his weight.

CHAPTER VII.

BUBASTES.

The detective's quickness alone saved him from grievous injury. The animal that had attacked him was a cat, black as midnight and twice the size of any cat he had ever seen.

With one hand tightly clutching the creature's throat, and the venomous claws tearing at his coat sleeves, he held the cat against the sarcophagus.

"Ach, Himmel!" came the agitated voice of the Herr Professor. "How could this have happened? Do not injure, do not hurt, Mr. Carter! See, I am here to take care of him. Kindly release the hold of your hands and step back. Nothing more will happen."

With a quick toss, Nick flung the cat to the floor at the base of the sarcophagus and jumped backward. The animal was up in a flash, spitting and snarling and ready to resume the attack.

The professor dropped down on his knees. There was a collar with a steel ring about the cat's neck, and Liedermann slipped the fingers of one hand through the collar while with the other hand he stroked the upstanding hair of the cat's back.

"Ach, Bubastes," he murmured, "what a naughty Bubastes! You slipped the chain, nicht whar? We must look to the chain. Quiet, quiet, lieber Bubastes!"

Under his soothing hand and voice Bubastes began to grow clam, to purr and to rub his black body against the Herr Professor's bent knees.

"Bubastes is from the Nile also, Mr. Carter," explained Liedermann. "Me he knows, and Senner also. Against strangers, however, he is hostile. We keep him secured with a steel chain except only at night. During the dark hours, he guards my treasures here, while Senner sleeps at the portal and watches the door. See, he is calm now."

Senner, white-faced and faltering, came into the den.

"I was looking for Bubastes, Herr Professor," said the clerk, in a shaking voice. "I saw he had slipped his chain and I was afraid he had got out of the rooms. I had gone to the elevator to look——"

"There must be a new chain got, Senner," interrupted Liedermann. "Take Bubastes away to his place."

Senner gripped the animal's collar and dragged it out into the room. A moment later a chain could be heard rattling on the farther side of the chamber.

"Were you injured, my friend?" inquired the professor, coming close to Nick.

"Nothing to speak of," replied the detective easily. "There's a scratch or two on my neck," and he showed the reddened handkerchief which he had been holding against the scratches, "but my collar prevented any serious injury."

His sleeves were torn somewhat, and there were a few minor abrasions on his hands.

"On the whole," he finished, "I was very lucky to get off so well."

"I am sorry that this should have happened," deplored the Herr Professor.

"It was an accident, and I beg you to think no more about it." Nick laughed a little while his eyes followed the skulking form of Senner, who was just making for the door of the anteroom. "Bubastes," he added, "is better than a watchdog."

The door closed on the clerk, but not until he had turned to throw one long, anxious look in the direction of the far corner and the detective.

"I continue much perturbed," said the Herr Professor.

"You need not," answered Nick; "but to get back to our muttons, professor, I should like to know whether you are acquainted with a Chicago detective named Hummer."

"Hummer? No, I know of no one by the name of Hummer. A detective, you say?" He shrugged his shoulders. "You are the only detective I know, Mr. Carter."

"I suppose you keep many articles of very great value in these rooms?"

The professor smiled amiably.

"Most of what I keep in this room, Mr. Carter, is of historical and antiquarian value. The really precious articles in my possession are kept in the strong room. No one has ever entered that strong room but me, not even Senner. The Lady of Senbtes is there, and—and——"

He paused for a moment, as though debating something in his mind. At last he started to his feet impulsively.

"But I will show it to you, Mr. Carter!" he exclaimed. "I will let you see my strong room. Come! It shall be done."

Apparently he was anxious to make up to the detective, by some unusual kindness, for the disagreeable incident caused by Bubastes.

Nick was led out of the corner and to the flowing red curtain. A twitch of the curtain caused it to slide backward, revealing the heavy steel door of the vault. Liedermann bent to the combination, gave the knob a perfunctory whirl and then set about turning it left and right to the numbers.

"No one," said he, as the knob caught on the last turn, "knows the combination of this my strong room but me. If anything were to happen to me, others of the society would have to have some expert safe opener get into the strong room for them."

The door was pulled open, revealing the two inner doors. These, when drawn out, gave access to a room three or four times larger than the ordinary vault. A swinging incandescent bulb, into which Liedermann switched the electricity, afforded ample light for a close view of the place.

On trestles, in the centre of the room, was a long, narrow box covered with a pall of black velvet.

"This is she, the one-time Lady of Senbtes, Mr. Carter," said the Herr Professor reverently. "Even now, after the many centuries, she is entitled to respect. I am not like those who deal in these relics of Ancient Egypt sordidly. It is not so much the—the commercial spirit that animates me as a love and consideration for the old peoples, and what a study of them may teach us. This royal mummy is not to be seen by curious eyes."

The room, on all sides, was lined with boxes sliding into steel casings. Many of the boxes were devoted to a collection of rare ancient coins unearthed in buried cities of Asia; in another were rare carvings in ivory, yellow with age and cunningly wrought; in others were parchment rolls and rolls of papyri; and in others were wonderful cameos.

Discoursing glibly and with the absorption of a connoisseur on all these treasures, Liedermann halted before a steel drawer of extra strength. His breath came sharply as he touched the drawer with a movement that was almost a caress.

"And here," said he, "is a gem of fabulous price, Mr. Carter! It dates from the time of the Crusades, and was bought by an emperor, in the sixteenth century, for the sum of twelve thousand ducats—say, twenty-eight thousand dollars of our money. But there is a vast difference between twelve thousand ducats then and now. If a price could be put upon such a treasure, I should lay it at one hundred thousand dollars. It belongs to a wealthy American, a patron of our society, who is now abroad with his family. He left the treasure with me for safe-keeping, and for study."

"What is it?" asked Nick curiously.

"I cannot tell you, my friend, nor can I let you even see it. I am merely trustee, and so must I be true to my trust."

"You say that no one ever comes into this room but yourself?"

"No one. You are the first, apart from myself, to come into this room for a year."

"Was it here that you packed the head of the Senbtes mummy?"

"Yes, and with my own hands."

"Did you take it to the express office yourself?"

"The express driver called, gave me his receipt, and went away with the hat box."

Liedermann leaned against the wall of drawers and appeared to be considering something.

"Mr. Carter," he went on finally, "I do not like to appear inquisitive, or to have you think that I will not readily answer your questions, but you must know that I am wondering."

"That would be no more than natural, Professor Liedermann," smiled Nick. "I come to you, and delve at once into a subject with a formula of questions that seem trivial and useless. But it is for your benefit in the long run, professor."

"My benefit? How am I to profit?"

"I prefer not to explain that until, let us say, to-morrow. I shall be armed with more information, then, and perhaps I can tell you something that will open your eyes."

"I am still more curious. Ah, you detectives!" and the professor gave Nick a whimsical look from behind his glasses. "I had supposed that no one but Senner knew of the sending of that shipment to Professor Gunyon in Chicago, and yet you come and question me about it forthwith. Certainly, Mr. Carter, you are a wonderful man."

"Perhaps not so wonderful in this matter, when all is known. Did your clerk, Senner, help you in any way in packing that hat box?"

The Herr Professor shook his head.

"Not at all, Mr. Carter."

"Did you go away from the strong room for a few moments while you were doing the packing?"

Liedermann showed his surprise at this new tack the detective was taking.

"It may be that I left it for a moment, just a moment, but——"

He was interrupted by a clang of steel. The door of the strong room had been slammed, and a nervous hand was fumbling with the lever to throw the steel rods into their sockets.

"Gott im Himmel!" gasped Liedermann, aghast, "what is happening?"

Already the alert detective was at the door, crowding against it with all his strength. Slowly it yielded, then gave with bound that precipitated Nick into the outer room.

Senner was lying on his back where he had been thrown by the impetus of the heavy door propelled by the detective's iron muscles.

Nick caught himself before he could fall, dropped to his knees, and twisted Senner's hands in front of him.

Something bright gleamed in Nick's hands. There followed a steely snap and he lifted himself erect.

The professor was tottering in the open door of the strong room.

"Lieber Gott," he gasped, "what is it about, Mr. Carter?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CORNER OF THE TRIANGLE.

Senner lay on the floor as though stunned; but if he had been stunned it was not by the door, but by Nick's agility and swift use of the handcuffs.

"Isn't it enough, professor," said Nick, "to know that your clerk tried to close the door and shut both of us in the strong room?"

Liedermann, bewildered, tossed his hands.

"I am overwhelmed!" he murmured.

"So is Senner," added Nick grimly; then, to Senner: "Get up!"

Senner obeyed promptly, spurred to movement by the detective's compelling voice. Nick thrust an arm through his.

"Come with us to the anteroom, professor," said Nick to Liedermann.

In momentous silence the three men pattered down the wide aisle between the columns and the mummy cases, the Herr Professor pausing only long enough to put out the light in the strong room, to close the door and to turn off the combination.

"Sit there, Senner," ordered Nick, pointing to a chair near the desk.

The clerk obeyed mechanically. His face was even more hueless than ordinary, and there was something in his eyes that spoke eloquently of despair.

Liedermann came heavily into the room and sank into a chair facing his clerk. The whirl of events still held him in a thrall of bewilderment.

"Don't try to move, Senner," said Nick; "it will not be well for you."

He seated himself at the desk and reached for the telephone. Central gave him his house and he asked for Chick. Joseph answered that Chick was not there.

"Is Patsy?"

"Yes."

"Have him come at once to the Egyptian Building. He knows where it is. Tell him he had better use the car."

Nick hung up the receiver and turned away from the telephone. By then, Liedermann had emerged from his trance.

"Senner, man," said he, in a tone of horror, "why did you try to shut Mr. Carter and me in the strong room?"

Senner stared stonily at his employer.

"We should have suffocated!" exclaimed Liedermann.

"I didn't intend that, professor," protested Senner. "I was going to go away, but I was going to telephone to some one to let you out before you could smother."

"Telephone to some one to let us out. Gott! Senner, to whom could you telephone?"

"To a firm of safe manufacturers. Those fellows always have an expert around to attend to such things. I wouldn't have harmed you, professor, for the world."

"You hadn't the chance, Gott sei dank! Why did you want to go away? I do not like this talk, Senner. And if you wanted to go away, why didn't you tell me, and why was it necessary to lock us in the strong room?"

The clerk closed his lips tightly and would not speak.

"Tell it to me, Senner!" implored Liedermann. "I have been your friend always. Why did you want to shut us in the vault?"

Still no answer from Senner. The muscles of his face worked convulsively, but he kept his lips closed.

"I'll tell you, professor," spoke up Nick. "He was afraid of me. Isn't that so, Senner?"

The clerk nodded.

"You have been afraid of me ever since you took my card and learned my name?"

Another nod.

"You listened to what we were saying in the vault?"

A mute affirmative, as before.

"You were afraid," pursued Nick, "that if you did not shut me up I would arrest you?"

"I was afraid," mumbled Senner.

"You were in the large room releasing Bubastes when the telephone bell rang and the Herr Professor went to answer it?"

"Yes."

"You hoped Bubastes would injure me so that I could not make trouble for you?"

"Yes."

"If you wanted to steal away, why didn't you go while Liedermann and I were talking?"

"I wanted to take a few things, and I was afraid that you would hear me and interfere."

"A few things of your own?"

"Of my own, yes."

"When you answered the telephone last night and gave a clear bill to Hummer, you had no idea that I would call here this morning?"

"No."

"If you had thought that you would have gone away last night?"

"Yes."

Silence followed, broken presently by the professor.

"You confuse me with it all! What has Senner done that he should want to go from me in such a way? What has he done, Mr. Carter, that you should arrest him?"

Nick again faced Senner.

"Will you make a clean breast of this, Senner?" he asked.

A glint of caution arose in Senner's eyes.

"I will say nothing," he answered.

Nick was disappointed. A confession by the clerk would have cleared up the situation in his own mind.

A mysterious crime had been committed. Had the detective diagramed the situation, he would have drawn a triangle. In one corner of the triangle he would have placed Senner; in another corner, the supposed express driver who had called for the hat box; and in the third corner, the red-faced man who had given the name of Hummer.

Nick had one corner of the triangle in his hands. He knew criminal work had been done, and that he had one of the criminals. But what was the crime? Liedermann was the victim, and Liedermann did not know it.

"Senner," persisted Nick, "I could point out to you the many advantages to yourself in telling everything you know."

The clerk threw up his head.

"Why don't you tell the professor yourself? Why are you juggling with me in this fashion? What do you know?"

"I will know enough by to-morrow to land you behind the bars," said Nick.

He turned to the professor.

"Liedermann," he went on, "Senner has admitted turning Bubastes loose in the hope of having the brute injure me, and he has admitted trying to shut us in the strong room so that he could gather up his personal property and make his escape unhindered. That knowledge is enough, isn't it?"

"Enough, yes," answered the Herr Professor blankly, "but not enough, either. What will you do with Senner, Mr. Carter?"

"I have sent for one of my assistants, and he will take charge of Senner, keeping him here until I come and explain everything to you."

"I am satisfied, Mr. Carter," said Liedermann; "your fame gives me every confidence in you, and you have a free hand so far as I am concerned. But I shall pass a bad afternoon and night waiting for you to come and explain. If I could know what Senner has done——"

"That point will be cleared up to-morrow."

"Then I possess my soul in patience until to-morrow."

Nick, keeping wary eyes on his prisoner, sat back in his chair and relapsed into thought. He was aroused by the chatter of the telephone bell.

Nick got up from the chair and motioned for Liedermann to answer. The Herr Professor dropped down by the desk and picked the receiver off the hook.

"Somebody wants Senner," said he, turning to Nick.

"Say to wait a moment, and that you will call him," whispered Nick.

Liedermann gave the required response, stood the receiver on the table and got up.

Nick Carter drew a revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"You will do as I say, Senner," he whispered, "or," and he touched the revolver, "you will take the consequences."

Senner started and cast a frightened look into the detective's face. He saw nothing there to indicate that the threat was a bluff.

Nick placed the transmitter in front of Senner's lips and motioned for Liedermann to hold it. Then, drawing back, he picked up the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"Say 'All right, this is Senner,'" Nick whispered, his free hand resting on the handle of the revolver.

Senner repeated the words.

"You know who this is, Senner," came the voice of Hummer over the wire to Nick's ear. "Who was that just answered?"

"The professor," whispered Nick, nodding to Senner.

In this manner was the conversation carried on, Nick, quick as lightning, framing the answers and throwing them at the clerk, and the clerk repeating them.

"Where is the professor now?"

"Gone out into the other room."

"You are alone in the office?"

"Yes."

"Everything worked out to a hair line. Has Carter, or any of his aides, called there?"

"No."

"Well, they won't. They're fooled to a fare-ye-well. Take it easy, Senner. Don't forget that I said I'd remember you."

"I won't forget, although I'm terribly worried. The professor may come back at any moment, and ——"

"Then hang up. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Nick took the transmitter from the professor, put the receiver in its place, and set the instrument on the desk.

At that moment Patsy stepped into the room. The manacled clerk, the rattled professor, and Nick's torn coat sleeves, were all more or less surprising to Patsy.

Nick explained briefly what he was to do.

"Is the car waiting?" he finished.

"Yes," was the answer.

Nick shook hands with Liedermann, gave him a final reassuring word, and stepped into the hall.

At the same moment Patsy was opening the door in the left-hand wall and showing Senner to his room.

CHAPTER IX.

A GOOD FORENOON'S WORK.

Chick had just reached the house when Nick got there. They had a late dinner together and Chick reported the results of his morning's work.

"I found Darrel Blenkyn without trouble, Nick. Whatever comes of this queer tangle, you'll find that you were right and that Blenkyn is innocent of any intentional wrongdoing."

"I was positive of his good faith last night."

"He's a nervous brother, but he means well. He went with me to the auction room on Twenty-third Street. It's one of the 'fake' houses, with hangers-on to run up the bidding, but now and then the proprietor does legitimate work for outside parties."

"Queer that outside parties should make use of such a man."

"He's a bird at the business, and perhaps that's why. The cashier is a strawberry blonde, nineteen, and of the gushing variety. The hangers-on were hard to locate, as not much business is done in the place until afternoon. I told the boss I had a collection of stuff I wanted him to sell for me. That made us friends, and we worked around to the express stuff. You were right about the sale being in March. The lot sold yesterday had been overlooked and didn't get into the March sale."

"Get any information about the brown grip?"

"Plenty of it. It was brought in by an expressman, after the rest of the stuff had been delivered. He said it had been pushed under the seat of the van and they had neglected to unload it with the other packages."

"That's good," said Nick. "I was bothered to understand how that mummy's head could have got into the brown bag in the auction room. The bag, it now transpires, was a gratuitous gift to the express company, and the company's a dollar ahead through Blenkyn's purchase. Anything else?"

"That's all, except that Blenkyn's gone to Great Barrington. I told him he could go."

"We shall not need Blenkyn any more."

Nick sketched events at the Egyptian Building.

"Well," exclaimed Chick, "for a forenoon's work that comes close to heading the procession."

"Out of it all," said Nick, "the point that most impresses me is the ingenuity and daring of this man Hummer."

"He certainly made a bold play."

"And he thought I was fooled!" Nick chuckled. "He thought I swallowed that yarn about his seeing the brown grip on the express wagon!"

"Not very complimentary to your intelligence," laughed Chick.

"His story was a strange commingling of truth and falsehood. The Herr Professor really sent that mummy's head away on the first of the month; and he really sent it to Professor Gunyon, at Chicago, or supposed that he had."

"I see."

"But all that corroborative detail which Hummer threw in about the brown grip having come to a Jan Kjellerman, who had formerly worked for Liedermann, was cut out of whole cloth."

"Liedermann didn't use the brown bag?"

"No. He used a leather hatbox."

"And the hatbox was picked up by a fake expressman?"

"Yes. And the head was changed by that same fake expressman from the hatbox to the brown bag. That is my belief."

"Mine, too, Nick. Go ahead."

"On the night of the third, let us say, our bogus expressman was in his room. Where that room is need not concern us at present. It is probably a safe haven for a very daring crook. He was there with the hatbox, the mummy's head, an evening paper, an exceedingly valuable bit of loot, and a brown bag—the brown bag that——"

"Where did he get the brown bag? Was it one he had, or——"

"That brings us to Hummer. Hummer isn't the man's name, of course, but we'll use it. Hummer must have furnished the bag."

"Why——"

"Wait. It had been arranged, I am positive, that the head and the loot were to change hands by means of the brown bag and the auction. I'm equally positive that Hummer was to bid on the bag, but that something scared him into letting Blenkyn bid it in. Naturally, Chick, it would have to be a bag which Hummer would have no difficulty in recognizing, on sight. Hummer furnished that bag to the fake expressman."

"Very likely."

"Hummer furnished the bag and laid his wires several days before the deal was pulled off. He and this fake expressman, perhaps from motives of precaution,

are not together very much. Now to proceed with the bogus express employee, whom we left in his room. This crook was 'on the make.' He wanted more than Hummer had promised him as his share of the swag. So he abstracts the bit of loot from that bandage and replaces it with the message telling Hummer to meet him at Madison Square, south of the fountain, at midnight to-night."

"That's all clear enough, Chick."

"Senner, of course, is at the very beginning of the affair. He must have known Liedermann was going to forward the relic to Professor Gunyon, he must have secured the valuable bit of loot and placed it under the bandage, and he must have signaled the fake expressman so he would know when to call."

"That's clear enough, too. But Hummer is the main squeeze. The whole plot was hatched by him, and he instructed the other two as to how they were to proceed."

"No doubt about that. Hummer is the arch conspirator. He is the ringleader, and the other two crooks are subordinates. Hummer followed Darrel Blenkyn in the hansom, last night, and saw him leave the bag at this house. Hummer didn't care a rap about Blenkyn, but he did want the bag. He went to the drug store and called up Senner in the Egyptian Building. And, by the way, that's another place where Hummer told the truth. Senner sleeps in a bedroom off the anteroom of the suite occupied by the Oriental Exploration Society, and within hearing of the telephone."

"He called up Senner," said Chick, "and told him to be on the steps of the Egyptian Building when the cab drove up."

"Yes. And when he talked with Senner he told him to answer the phone and tell me that one Hummer, a detective, had authority to receive the bag."

Chick drew a long breath.

"That was bold!" he exclaimed. "Hummer took a long chance with Senner. Your call at the society's rooms, and your talk with Liedermann, showed up Senner's hand."

"But Hummer didn't think I would call. He believed he had fooled me completely, and that I would consider the matter of the brown bag a closed incident."

Chick laughed.

"And that, Nick," said he, "is where Hummer fooled himself and got Senner into trouble."

"And himself into trouble. Hummer has read the message which he found under that bandage. He is laying to have a talk with his confederate to-night. And right there is my chance."

"You will be in Madison Square at midnight to-night?"

"I'll be there, but Hummer won't know it."

Nick pushed back from the table, lighted a cigar and smoked thoughtfully for a few moments. Chick respected his chief's mood and waited until he got ready to proceed.

"What is your first general conception of this affair, Chick?" the detective asked presently, turning quizzical eyes on his assistant.

"Why, the same that I had last night, Nick."

And that is——"

"That a whole lot of useless and dangerous machinery had been used in transferring a bit of loot from Senner to Hummer. Why wasn't Hummer the bogus expressman? That would have given him what he wanted at a great saving of time and energy. What was the use of the transfer from the hatbox to the brown bag, and all this business at the auction room? A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and this chain is full of weak links; furthermore, nearly every element of weakness has been injected into the affair by the incredible folly of being overcautious."

"Your conception, Chick, was mine."

"The crime, whatever it is, would have been successful but for Darrel Blenkyn. Cut out the auction room and you would have had nothing to do with the case."

"There is only one explanation, Chick."

"What is that?"

"Why, that we are dealing with at least two men who are 'wanted.' Hummer, I take it, is playing a game where the least slip will land him behind the bars for some other game. His measurements are at headquarters, his photograph in the police gallery. The fake expressman is in the same case. Maybe they were pals, and worked through a trick that proscribed them both. To be seen together now might spell disaster for the two. They are keeping apart, and yet they are working another deal in common. That would account for the weak links in your chain, Chick."

Nick got up from his chair.

"To-night will tell the story, I suppose," said Chick.

"I hope it will tell us what the ruction is all about. We have been going it blind. And Liedermann himself is blind—blind as a bat. He doesn't even know that he has been victimized."

"If Senner had only weakened, and told what he knew!"

"He didn't weaken, because he suspects that my knowledge is limited. He's holding back his confession in the hope that I can't make out a case."

With that, Nick left the room and mounted thoughtfully to his study.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SMALL HOURS.

Twelve flashes from the top of the Metropolitan Tower cut a dividing line between the sixth of the month and the seventh.

Midnight.

Where the Flatiron Building stood like a snag in the stream of commerce, dividing the rolling flood of trade and sending it onward to right and left, the night's activity of a great city was close to the vanishing point.

In Madison Square, south of the fountain, a figure

was crumpled into the corner of a bench. The figure, what could be seen of it, indicated a man who was not exactly a tramp, but who was certainly down on his luck.

The man's hands were in his pockets, his head was bowed forward slightly, and he seemed to be asleep.

But he was not asleep. Every faculty was keenly on the alert.

The minutes dragged. Once or twice the man on the bench drowsily shifted his position—and every new shift enabled him to make a survey of the shadows in a different direction.

An hour must have passed, and the city's pulses were all but stilled.

Another man came lurching along the walk toward the fountain. He came from the south, from the direction of the Seward statue, and his unsteadiness argued an overload of liquor.

At the bench he bumped into the feet of the drowsy man and pitched forward.

"Wot's de matter wit' yer feet?" the fellow gulped thickly, picking himself up. "Haul 'em in an' stop spreadin' 'em over de walk."

"Aw, go on," growled the other.

"Vous can't t'row nuttin' intuh me," said the unsteady one with a quick show of animosity.

The other straightened alertly on the seat, then jumped up with fists clenched.

"Hummer's on the way, Nick," breathed the man who had stumbled over the other's feet, "down Fifth, past Martin's. He'll be here in a jiff."

"Good. Keep north of the fountain, Chick. Leave Hummer to me. You trail the other one."

"Aw," said Chick, "I wouldn't muss up wit' a cove dat's half asleep. Go back t' bed, bo."

Chick slouched on and Nick dropped back into his corner of the bench.

A stout, thickset man entered the Square. Presently the crunch of his footsteps merged into the splashing of the fountain.

Nick saw him. Under the electric lights, throwing their shadows through the tree branches, the man grew plain enough.

It was Hummer.

And in Hummer's hand was the fateful brown bag.

Hummer passed Nick, giving him a sharp look as he did so. The next bench to Nick's was vacant and Hummer dropped down in it.

The man who claimed to be a detective and from Chicago leaned back, elbows on the back of the bench, thumbs in the armholes of his vest and brown bag on his knees. He was watching keenly in all directions.

"He's more than an hour late," thought Nick. "I wonder if the other fellow has got tired of waiting and gone away?"

Even as he asked himself this mental question, another man moved briskly along the walk. He was slender, quick in his movements, and had the indefinable stealthy air that characterizes one of the underworld.

"Well!" called the man from the bench.

The other turned in toward him and dropped down at his side. They talked for a few moments, their voices rising high.

Suddenly the man with the brown bag flung himself toward his companion and gripped him about the throat. With an eellike twist the other slipped from the clutching fingers and stood in front of the panting Hummer.

"Do as I say," Nick heard the slender man tell Hummer.

Hummer answered, but in a tone more guarded. The slender man handed Hummer something. Hummer thrust the object into his pocket.

The other man turned hurriedly and went west. He was Chick's man.

Hummer, at a more leisurely gait, started north along the winding asphalt walk. Nick, rising to follow, saw Chick slouching toward Broadway on the trail of the man who had spoken with Hummer.

As for Hummer himself, he made for Fifth Avenue. A little behind, and on the opposite side of the street, Nick warily shadowed him.

The avenue was well-nigh deserted and it was easy for the detective to keep track of the dark figure across the way.

It would be easy, too, for Hummer, if he was in any way watchful and suspicious, to note that some one was dogging his steps.

Nick, however, was cautious.

Hummer reached Thirty-third Street. He stood there for a space, looking up and down the cross thoroughfare. Nick watched him from the deep shadow of a doorway.

A stray hansom came along Thirty-third, the clatter of the horse's hoofs echoing sharply. Hummer called and ran out a little into the street.

The cabby chanced to be looking for a fare, and he brought the hansom sharply up to the curb. Hummer got into the cab with the brown bag, closed the aprons, and the driver bent to his cut hole for directions.

A moment later the cab started north.

A hotel cab stand was not far from Nick, at that moment, and, after a hasty look around for another wandering "nighthawk," he hastened to the hotel cab stand and found a taxi.

He slapped the driver into wakefulness.

"See that hansom?" asked Nick, pointing toward the receding cab.

"Sure," answered the driver.

"Keep a block or so behind it—far enough behind so the driver won't suspect that we're following. If you're in doubt, at any time, communicate with me."

The driver looked at the bill that had been thrust into his hands.

"Holy smoke!" he muttered, and was instantly wide awake and ready to do anything for his client in danger.

The chase that followed proved that the most can-

tious way between two points is by a roundabout course.

Through Thirty-eighth to Lexington Avenue, back on a double to Fifth Avenue, south to Twenty-third, then off toward Fourth Avenue. Just west of Lexington Avenue the cab stopped at the curb.

Nick's driver let him out around the corner.

"I guess your party has got to where he's goin'," said the driver. "Want me any more?"

"Stay here for five minutes," answered Nick, jumping out. "If I'm not back by then I'll not need you."

He got to the corner just in time to see Hummer climbing the steps of a rusty-looking house. Keeping in the shadow, Nick sped swiftly along the house fronts.

The door at the top of the steps closed as Hummer let himself out of sight in the depths of the dark building. The hansom cab had gone, and it looked as though Hummer was to remain in the house for some time.

Nick studied the front of the house. It was built solidly into a shabby block and might be a second-rate boarding house.

Was this the place where Hummer lodged while in the city? Or had he an appointment here with the man he had met in the Square?

The two men had separated after a rather spirited discussion. Hummer had been given something. Was that something the key to the house door?

That the two men, even in the small hours of the morning, had not come together to the rendezvous was in line with their seemingly settled program to keep apart.

If that house was really to be a meeting place for Hummer and the other man, where a certain important matter was to be settled between them, then the other man was either already in the house and waiting for Hummer, or else he was following Hummer.

If the other man was in the house, well and good. Chick would also be there.

But if the other man was yet to come, then he would be behind Nick, and the detective would have to be doubly on his guard.

Nick was only a few moments at the foot of the steps indulging in these reflections.

Lightly he gained the door.

The key was in the lock!

The other man had had only the one key. He had given it to Hummer. Hummer had used it and left it in the lock for its owner.

This seemed clear enough. It was also clear that the other man had planned to follow Hummer, and that he would not be long in following him.

That key, if it was a good thing for Hummer's confederate, was a better thing for the detective.

Softly he turned it and as softly opened the door and stepped into the cavernous darkness of a hall.

So quickly had he worked that Hummer's steps were still on the stairs. A faint glow came down from above.

Nick stepped to the stair foot and craned his neck upward.

Hummer, with a lighted match, was ascending the second flight. Nick saw the match turn along the hall of the third floor and move rearward.

One, two, three, four, five, six—he counted the footfalls from the head of the stairs. Six paces and Hummer stopped.

Another key rattled in a hall door. The door opened, closed. After that, silence.

"Now for the rest of it," thought Nick, and started up the dark stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE HOUSE.

No one seemed astir in that house except the detective and Hummer.

Nick climbed the two flights and took six noiseless steps rearward along the hall. This brought him in front of a door around which came a line of yellow gaslight. Some one could be heard stirring on the other side of the door.

"That's where he is," thought Nick.

He stepped back, drew his pocket torch and flashed it. To the left of the room entered by Hummer there was a door leading into another apartment.

Undoubtedly the two rooms were arranged en suite, and the connecting door locked and latched to make the rooms separate and distinct. That was the arrangement, Nick knew, in most of the old houses in that part of the city.

If he could get into the adjoining room, he reasoned, he might find himself in a better position to keep track of Hummer.

Snapping off the torch he replaced it in his pocket; then, softly approaching the door on the left, he ran his fingers over the keyhole. There was a key in the lock—he felt the end of it.

This probably indicated that the room was occupied. He hesitated for a moment, debating the situation.

To effect entrance, and find himself in a room with some stranger who would probably resent the intrusion, would have been more than unwise—it would have apprised Hummer of certain things it was necessary for the detective to keep from him.

Nick glided along the hall toward the front, still with his torch for an aid.

Another room opened off the hall at the side, and a hall bedroom off the end.

The door on the right of Hummer's room likewise had a key in the lock.

Nick was given his choice of disturbing inmates in a room on each side of the one occupied by Hummer. He had to make his decision quickly, for the other man could be expected at any moment.

Retracing his way to the rear door he took a pair of nippers from his pocket, clenched them on the small

stem of the key that projected through the lock and deftly turned the key itself.

There was not much trouble about this, and not much noise. The difficult part of the undertaking was still to come.

Nick paused and listened with his ear at the door crack. He heard nothing to arouse his apprehensions.

Grasping the knob firmly he twisted it with steady pressure.

If the door happened to be bolted as well as locked with a key——

But it was not. The door slowly swung inward and Nick stepped into the inner blackness.

He did not release the knob until he had let it turn slowly back to its normal position. Then he removed his hand, caught the other knob, closed the door, and turned the key.

Leaning against the wall and scarcely breathing, he listened again, boring his gaze into the surrounding gloom. He saw two patches of lighter shadow opposite him, and knew them for outside windows. This room was at the back of the house, and the two windows were in the end wall. The shades were drawn, but the shades were not entirely opaque.

He heard nothing and could see nothing to arouse his apprehensions. And yet, he reasoned, there must be some one in that room with him.

Cautiously he snapped on the torch. Instinctively a breath of relief escaped his lips.

There was a bed in the room, but it was unoccupied. The bedclothes were disarranged. Either the one who occupied the room had gone away before the night was done, or else the bed had not been made up from the preceding night.

But, reasoned the detective, if the occupant of the room had left it, how did it happen that the door was locked and the key on the inside?

There was another door, and it communicated with the room toward the front—the room Hummer had entered.

Then it flashed over Nick that these two rooms were arranged en suite, and used in that way. Together they comprised the lodgings of one of the men the detective was trailing.

The danger of the situation redoubled. Nick did not want to be discovered until he had learned the nature of the business that had brought Hummer and the other man together. He wanted information regarding the loot that had been inclosed in the brown bag with the mummy's head.

He continued to flash the torch around him. There was a wardrobe against one wall, and across one corner stood a writing desk. A washbowl occupied another corner.

There seemed no very safe place in which to hide.

After Nick had finished his inspection, he listened for sounds from the other room.

Hummer was moving about, displacing the furniture, apparently. Suddenly his steps approached the door connecting the other room with the room behind.

The detective extinguished his torch, dropped to the floor, and rolled under the bed.

The disarranged bedclothes hung down over the side of the bed in such a way as to afford some slight protection against discovery.

The door opened. Light streamed into the rear room and the figure of Hummer bulked large against the glowing background.

He stepped into the room, struck a match and applied the flame to a gas bracket against the wall over the washbowl, then, moving to the centre of the chamber, he appeared to be studying it.

Presently he stepped to the wardrobe, pulled open the doors, and removed a sole-leather hatbox.

Nick was at once intensely interested.

Hummer knelt down, unbuckled the strap, and opened the box. Evidently it was empty, for he muttered a curse and threw the box from him.

He was in a bad humor, there was no doubt. Getting to his feet, he walked to the writing desk, jerked open the drawers, and examined their contents roughly. Again an oath of disappointment escaped him.

"You needn't look," came a voice from the open door of the other room. "I wasn't born yesterday, Jim Senner. You could hunt till doomsday without finding what you want."

The slender man was standing in the doorway, the light from the bracket jet beating over his grimly determined face.

Nick, shielded by the bedclothes that dropped over the side of the bed, twisted around until he secured a good look at the man.

He was dark, almost swarthy. There was a sinister look in his eyes that spoke of courage and craftiness.

Hummer whirled from the writing desk.

"Blast you, Featherfingers," he cried, exasperated, "where did you put it? I'll swear it's around this joint somewhere."

"You'll not find it; and you'll not get it till I'm ready to turn it over to you."

Hummer's hand dropped to his pocket—a pocket that sagged under some heavy weight.

"Hand's off that gun!" warned Featherfingers. "You don't want to do any shooting here. It wouldn't be wise in more ways than one. I'm the key to that thing you want. With me out of the way you'd be completely up in the air. Calm yourself and come into the other room while we talk the matter over."

"You can't hold me up, Featherfingers!" growled Hummer.

"I'll have an even split. I'm entitled to that."

"An even split when there are three of us in on the deal?"

"Your brother don't count," answered the other contemptuously.

Hummer, mumbling wrathfully, followed Featherfingers into the front room.

"If you've got that with you," said he, "we might have fixed this up in Madison Square. Dodging around together like this is dangerous—for both of us."

Featherfingers laughed.

"If I'm willing to take a chance," he returned, "you ought to be. I've as much to lose as you have."

He backed into the front room, keeping his face to Hummer as he went. Evidently he was taking no chances with the man.

Hummer closed the door behind him and Featherfingers, but he left the gas burning.

Nick lay where he was for a moment.

"Senner, Jim Senner," he murmured. "And he's the brother of that other Senner whom Patsy is guarding in the Egyptian Building. This begins to clear slowly."

Nick reached out his hand and drew the leather hatbox toward him.

A label was pasted on its side consigning the box to Professor Gunyon, at Chicago.

"Featherfingers is the second member of this trio," thought Nick, "and here's where he transferred the mummy's head from the hatbox to the brown bag."

He was moving along the line of least resistance toward success, and very naturally he felt elated. Very quietly he got out from under the bed and arose to his knees.

The open doors of the wardrobe were in front of him and the gaslight gave him a view of the wardrobe's contents.

All that was hanging in the wardrobe were a blue cap and a blue coat. The light glinted on a metal badge over the cap's vizor.

"There's Featherfingers' make-up as an expressman," muttered Nick. "The evidence is slowly piling up. Chick must be in the hall, for even if Featherfingers took the key out of the front entrance Chick would find a way to get in. A word with him and then we'll proceed to draw this affair to a close."

Noiselessly Nick opened the hall door and stepped through, closing the door after him.

"Chick?" he whispered.

There was no response. Just at that moment there came the sound of a heavy fall in the room where Hummer and Featherfingers were having their talk.

Nick, under the impression that Featherfingers, in some manner, had eluded Chick, believed that the settlement of the whole matter had been thrown upon his own shoulders.

Returning hastily to the room he had just vacated, he stepped to the door in the partition and pulled it partly open.

With one hand on the knob and the other on his revolver, he stared into the room beyond.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BONE OF CONTENTION.

A double partition separated the two rooms. There was only one door, for a swinging curtain, half drawn, draped the opening in the second partition.

Between the two partitions was a space of about four feet, and was utilized for closets and for storing purposes. The narrower end—between the doors and the hall—was banked with drawers. On the other side was the closet room.

This arrangement was very favorable for the detective. Passing through the door he stepped to the half-drawn curtain.

He had not been heard by either Hummer or Featherfingers. Those two worthies were engaged in a struggle which completely absorbed their attention.

Featherfingers was down on his back and Hummer was over him.

"Do you want to arouse the house, you fool?" gasped Featherfingers.

"I'll get what I'm after even if it brings the police," wheezed Hummer, trying clumsily to insert a hand in Featherfingers' breast pocket.

The attempt cost Hummer dear. In an instant the lighter man had twisted out of Hummer's grip, had rolled away, and gained his feet.

Bending down he snatched a revolver from off the floor and leveled it at Hummer.

"Get up and take a chair," he ordered. "I'm getting my fill of this. You'll come across with a thousand before I give you what you're after. Did you bring any money with you? If you didn't, you've lost your chance."

Hummer picked himself up with a black scowl.

"A nice sort of a pal, you are," he puffed. "Glor! I was a fool for having anything to do with you."

"You've tried to keep me at a distance, with your brown bag and your auction," snapped Featherfingers, "but you might have known we'd have to get together before we could wind this up. We'll both be in stir for this night's work if you don't put clamps on that temper of yours."

Featherfingers had backed to the hall door, and was listening. He continued to keep his revolver leveled at Hummer, however.

"Put up your gun and we'll talk business," snarled Hummer.

"I thought I heard a noise in the hall, just before you downed me," said Featherfingers, "but I must have been mistaken. I can't hear anything now. It's luck, too, nothing less. Put up the gun? Well, Jim, not until I've seen the last of you."

Hummer had taken a chair by a small table. Featherfingers seated himself on the other side of the table and laid the revolver down in front of him.

"This'll be the last job we ever pull off together," declared Hummer, his voice dripping venom.

"I'm agreed. You're not on the square with your pals, anyhow. You want the big end of every job."

"I'm taking chances on this one. I may get something and I may get nothing. It depends on how I can string Jason Pedwell along. He's in Europe, and I'll have to cross the pond to dicker with him."

"I'll risk your making him loosen up," sneered Featherfingers.

"The boats are all watched," complained Hummer, "and how do you suppose I'll get away?"

"You'll do it. Withal your habit of double-crossing a pal, I'll admit you're as crafty a fox as ever dodged a plain-clothes man. I've got a thousand out of this, and I want a thousand more. You talk about your own risks. Have you stopped to consider the risks I took? Joliet isn't much more than a thousand miles from here, and I've been starring myself on your account when I should have been laying low. I've only the thousand you gave me, and my plans for keeping my liberty call for more. It's a ground-hog case with me, Jim, no less than with yourself."

"Where are you going?"

That's my business. Up to now your brother and I have done all the work. He got the loot and put it under the bandage that swathed that mummy's head. He tipped me off as to when to call. I hired an express wagon, piled it with useless plunder, and showed myself in Sixth Avenue in broad day. Liedermann fell for the play, and I brought the hatbox here——"

"And lifted the loot yourself!" scowled Hummer.

"I had to have more, and I knew you'd never give it after you had everything in your own hands."

"You've made a mess of it, Featherfingers."

"You're the one that's made the mess. You insisted on that brown bag and the auction. I carried the bag to the place on Twenty-third and got away with the play. But that was more risk—for me. Why didn't you bid in the bag, as you intended, instead of letting this Darrel Blenkyn get it?"

"I saw a man in that crowd in the auction room that looked suspicious to me," explained Hummer, "so I kept in the background."

"That's where you began to boggle," taunted Featherfingers. "Blenkyn took the bag to Nick Carter. If you'd got it, as planned, that wouldn't have happened."

"Carter is sidetracked. That was a slick play I made, and he never tumbled."

"He will tumble, just as soon as that old seed of a professor finds that Gunyon didn't get the mummy."

"By then, Featherfingers, we'll both be safe out of this."

"Well, let's cut this short. Did you bring any money?"

"I've brought five hundred. That's all I can spare."

"Don't lie to me, Jim."

"That's right, on the dead."

Featherfingers' hand closed on the butt of the revolver.

"Then we can't do business," said he, "and you'd better get out. I left the front door unlocked for you."

Hummer hoisted up in his chair.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded.

"Just that. Maybe I'll cross the pond myself and dicker with Jason Pedwell."

Hummer swore roundly, dove into his pocket and fished up a roll of bank notes.

"I thought that would bring you to time," jeered Featherfingers.

"Maybe I'll get you where I want you some time," gulped the other, "then look out."

"If I'm ever fool enough to let that happen," chuckled Featherfingers, "you're welcome to put on the screws."

"You want a thousand, eh?" queried Hummer, stripping off the bills from the roll.

"Yes."

"There you are," and he laid a number of the bills on the table, covering them with one hand while he replaced what was left of the roll in his pocket. "Now, where's the loot?"

"Is that good stuff or queer? Sometimes, Jim, your pockets are lined with the make-believe."

"You can bank on it that this money is regular goods. Why, I was keeping it for traveling expenses—my own safety depended on its passing muster."

"I wouldn't believe you under oath, but I'll have to take a chance."

Still with his right hand on the revolver, Featherfingers reached his left into the breast of his coat and drew out a thin, oblong object wrapped in a bit of newspaper. He laid it down in front of him.

"Is that what I want, or something else?" demanded Hummer.

"Look at it," said Featherfingers curtly.

What Hummer looked at Nick Carter could not see, as Hummer's bulk acted as a screen.

"It's a bally piece of rot to be quoted at a hundred thousand," muttered Hummer.

The differences between these two crooks had its humorous side. Each knew the other, and each was afraid to trust the other. Both wanted the best of the bargain, but Featherfingers was calling Hummer at every turn.

"You'll get enough for the thing, I'm thinking," said Featherfingers, reaching for the money.

Hummer rewrapped the object in the piece of newspaper, and laid it beside him on the table.

"Why don't you go?" asked Featherfingers. "We're at the parting of the ways, and will never cross trails again. We've both got what we were after, so the quicker we separate the better."

"We've always done well together, Featherfingers," observed Hummer, getting friendly and forgiving.

"Oh, yes," sneered Featherfingers. "I got nipped for that Chicago play, and you got clear by the skin of your teeth. We've done real well together, we have. Where'd I be now if I hadn't downed one of the guards and made a break? I'd be doing odd jobs in the stove works in the Joliet pen."

"I've a scheme for getting away together, Featherfingers, and I believe it would work."

"Your schemes are always good for Jim Senner, but you don't care a whoop for your pals. I'm done with you. Walk! As I said a moment ago, the door downstairs is open."

"Now, don't be so infernal offish, Featherfingers. Just wait until you hear what I have to say."

"The night's going, and I haven't time. This place won't know me at daylight. Clear, Jim. I'm roiled clear through, so don't stand on the order of your going——"

In the rear room there was a sudden crash, as of a chair or something being overturned.

Both Hummer and Featherfingers were on their feet in an instant.

"What the blazes——" began Hummer.

Featherfingers, not pausing for any useless remarks, jumped for the door leading into the rear room.

He lurched past Nick, never seeing him.

"Get the loot, Nick!" called a voice from the room behind.

It was Chick's voice, and the next instant, Nick, divining that his assistant had also been near enough to keep track of events, sprang past the curtain and came to handgrips with Hummer.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHICK'S RUSE.

Of the two crooks, Hummer was vastly the more cautious. A very short walk would have carried him to Featherfingers' lodgings, but he called a hansom and went the longest way round.

Featherfingers had sauntered westward toward the Hoffman House corner. Chick, skirting the western edge of the square, kept track of Featherfingers from the shadow of the Farragut monument.

Featherfingers paused to light a cigar, then worked north into Fifth Avenue. He strolled up the avenue a short distance, moved west to Broadway, came south to the Square again, and jogged along Twenty-third Street.

On Twenty-third Street he turned into an all-night restaurant, and Chick, passing by, looked in and saw him drinking a cup of coffee and eating a sandwich.

"What's the play, anyhow?" thought Chick, a little puzzled. "Aren't he and Hummer going to get together? He's taking his time about keeping an appointment, it seems to me."

Possibly Featherfingers was in the restaurant for fifteen minutes. He came out, still strolling leisurely along, and Chick dropped in after him.

Featherfingers did not seem to fear recognition in the least. Not once did he look behind him.

He came at last to the end of his wanderings, mounted a flight of steps and went into a house.

Chick was at the door while Featherfingers was ascending to the second floor.

"Wonder if I can work this open with a skeleton key," thought Chick, "or if I'll have to try my skill on one of the basement windows."

He was prepared to try either method, but found that no very great difficulty confronted him in getting into the house.

The front door had been left unlocked!

What did that mean? Chick asked himself. Did the crook have an idea he was being shadowed, and was the door left unlocked as an invitation for Chick to entrap himself?

"Here goes, all the same," muttered Chick, and stepped through the door and into the hall.

The house was silent, and there were no sounds above to indicate that Featherfingers was still climbing.

Chick gained the second floor, stepping carefully and keeping close to the banisters to prevent the stairs from creaking.

Finding nothing on that floor to claim his attention, he started for the next. His head and shoulders had hardly risen above the landing of the second flight when a door opened and a glow flooded the hall.

He saw his man plainly, and the remarkable thing was that the man did not see him. The door closed, gloom once more filled the hall, and Chick could hear voices.

He paused in front of the door through which Featherfingers had vanished. The tone of the voices was harsh, but it was not possible for Chick to distinguish anything that was said. One of the voices—and it was the voice of Hummer—seemed to come from a rear room.

Chick moved down the hall.

A crack of light shone around the next door, so it seemed pretty evident that the rendezvous contained two rooms, with two doors opening on the hall.

It was a relief to Chick to know that Hummer was in the rooms.

But where was Nick?

Had Hummer, in some manner, managed to blind his trail so that Nick had lost it?

This seemed hardly a reasonable supposition, considering Nick's remarkable skill in the art of shadowing.

And yet, if Nick had not lost the trail, where was he?

At the rear end of the hall was a door that stood a little ajar.

Chick, his pocket flare going, stepped through the door and into a bathroom. In the farther wall of the bathroom was a curtainless window with a frosted glass. Chick passed to it, turned the sash lock and raised the window.

He could have given a shout of exultation at what he discovered.

The roof of a two-story addition came flush up under the window sill. There were bars across the outside of the window, but the wood had rotted away from the sockets, and he succeeded in wrenching two of them out with but very little noise.

To step out on the roof and make his way to the windows of the rear room took him only a minute.

He was now, as he believed, at the windows of the rear room—the room in which he had heard Hummer's voice. The voice was not in evidence now, but

Chick, as he stood on the roof, heard something which caused his pulses to skip a beat.

It was the sound of a heavy fall.

Rough work was going forward in the rooms. Could it be that Nick was in any way concerned in it?

The thought inspired Chick with a desire to get into the rear room in the shortest possible time.

The two windows were guarded with bars, like the bathroom window. He had brought one of the bars with him, and he now used it as a lever to clear some of the iron out of his way.

A quick pry lifted out one of the rods, and a second attempt brought away another.

The window, fortunately, was not locked. Chick raised it and thrust head and shoulders into a lighted room.

There was a door opposite the window, and it was open by a couple of inches. Through the crack came a give and take of angry voices.

There was no one in the rear room, so far as Chick could see, and he pushed aside the shade and crawled through the window.

Nick, failing to find Chick in the hall, had supposed that the end of the trail left him with the burden of winding up the affair single-handed. Chick's thoughts now ran in the same fashion. Hard as it was for him to believe it, yet circumstances pointed to the supposition that Nick had lost track of Hummer.

"It's now or never," thought Chick. "This matter has got to be settled at once or the fat is in the fire for good."

He started carefully across the room toward the opposite door. The hatbox, close to the foot of the bed, claimed his attention.

He stooped and picked it up, read the address label pasted to its side, and chuckled grimly.

"It's Liedermann's box, all right," he murmured, "and here's where the fake express driver transferred the mummy's head to the brown bag."

He peered into the open wardrobe, seeing there what Nick had already discovered.

"Better and better!" thought Chick. "If Nick had got here he would have been surprised at the way he hit off the doings of those two crooks."

Chick glided to the partly open door, and peered through. What he saw staggered him, for a moment.

Less than four feet away from him was Nick, hugging a curtain draped in a doorway and peering out into the forward room.

When Chick had caught his breath and adjusted himself to the situation, a thrill of pride ran through him at this fresh evidence of his chief's skillful handling of a difficult situation.

And he imagined that Nick had been thrown off the trail!

Leaning against the wall and peering through the crack of the door, Chick's gaze passed the edge of the curtain and rested on the form of Hummer, sitting beside a table.

Hummer was counting off bank notes from a roll and talking with Featherfingers. The latter was apparently on the other side of the table, and out of Chick's range of vision.

Chick was able to follow the conversation that passed between the two crooks, and Nick was so absorbed in watching and listening that he had no time to look around and take note of his assistant.

The thin, square, newspaper-wrapped object, which was the cause of all that play of cross-purposes, was exchanged for the money Hummer had counted off his roll.

Chick saw the slim fingers of the hand that reached the packet over to Hummer, and he saw Hummer unwrap the object, examine it, rewrap it and lay it on the table.

The detectives, it seemed sure, had the thieves and the loot firmly in their own hands, but what might happen, should Hummer get that packet into his coat, was something that caused Chick considerable worry.

He did not dare speak to Nick, for the men in the front room might have heard and have executed some coup which would have placed them, and the thin packet, in hazard.

If Chick could do something which would enable Nick to get the bit of valuable loot in his own hands, and do it quickly, the crooks themselves could be attended to later.

Chick turned back into the room, picked up the hatbox, and threw it with considerable force at the wall.

At the same time he called to Nick to get the packet.

Then and there events began to happen with a rush.

Featherfingers, dashing past Nick, hurled himself into the rear room. He had a revolver in his hand, and leveled it for a quick shot.

Before his finger could flex upon the trigger, Chick had grabbed the hand in a strong grip, and was crushing it about the butt of the revolver. At the same time Chick seized Featherfingers' other hand.

"Who are you?" panted Featherfingers, as he stared into Chick's face.

"Nick Carter's assistant," said Chick. "You're my prisoner."

"Not yet!"

Then began a struggle, during which Featherfingers fell backward across the foot of the bed, dropped his revolver, and Chick managed to get both hands around his throat.

From the other room, when the battle lulled in the room at the rear, came sounds that indicated that Hummer was having all and more than he could attend to.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTURED.

Hummer was far and away the stronger of the two crooks, although Featherfingers could have given him points on quickness and skill.

The sight of Nick Carter brought all Hummer's savage blood uppermost.

"You!" he muttered, wrenching clear of Nick's hands.

"This is queer work for a detective, Hummer," said Nick sarcastically.

A demoniacal look twisted the lines of Hummer's face, and he let drive with a tremendous blow straight at the detective's head.

Had that blow ever reached its mark a fractured skull would have been the result.

But the hamlike fist swept Nick's shoulder, and the force of the blow, spending itself on air, hurled Hummer full tilt against the detective.

Nick's hands moved like lightning. By a trick of jujutsu he secured both of Hummer's wrists, and had his arms in chancery in less than two seconds.

"Steady, Hummer!" he said coolly. "A little more pressure here and I could break your arm."

"Curse you!" wheezed Hummer. "If you want that brown bag, take it."

"That brown bag isn't all I want."

"What else?"

"You."

Nick released Hummer's left hand. Before Hummer could take advantage of the move, Nick had whirled him around by the other wrist, and had shoved a revolver into his face.

"I don't want to shoot," said Nick, "but I'm ready to do what I have to."

He released the wrist and gave Hummer a push toward a chair.

"Better sit down," he added.

Hummer slumped into the chair, one hand reaching for the thin packet on the table.

"Keep away from that," ordered Nick, and took the packet himself and thrust it into his pocket.

"You want the brown bag, you say," glowered Hummer, "and you want me; but you haven't anything to do with that."

"If I find I haven't," answered Nick, "I'll return it to you. Put out your hands!"

Hummer put out his hands, but he grabbed Nick with them, desperately determined to win his liberty at all hazards.

Nick could have used his revolver and have brought the struggle to a quick termination. But that was not to his liking.

Dropping the weapon so that he could have free use of both hands, he tripped Hummer and floored him. For just the fraction of a moment it looked as though Hummer might get the better of the detective.

In the fall, Hummer managed, by sheer force of his weight, to get on top. He was there just long enough to give him a flash of hope, and then the flash faded into fresh despair, for Nick had overset him, and was on him with both knees, and drawing his fat wrists together with the steady, implacable pressure of a vise.

Hummer still fought against the steel bracelets, but Nick had his way, and the big hands were soon helpless.

At that moment, Chick came from the rear room, personally conducting Featherfingers. Featherfingers likewise sported a pair of handcuffs.

"It was quick enough at the finish, eh, Nick?" remarked the assistant.

"Quick, and a bit surprising," Nick answered. "Place your man next to Hummer."

Chick pushed a chair into the required position, and the two prisonres were side by side.

"Now are you satisfied?" jeered Featherfingers, his flaming eyes on Hummer.

"Glor!" gulped Hummer. "How could I help it?"

"Oh, you couldn't help it. Your fool notions about changing hands with the loot didn't have a thing to do with this, I guess. Senner, you're the limit."

"All you want is the mummy's head, isn't it, Carter?" inquired Hummer. "You can't want me for anything. Getting the brown bag out of your hands wasn't anything more than petty larceny, and——"

Nick turned away to answer a knock on the door.

"What's de trouble goin' on up yar?" demanded a sleepy negro. "'Peahs lak de house was tumblin' down. De lodgers on de nex' flo' says dey got tuh hab mo' quiet. Dey's complainin' a lot."

The negro looked in, saw the men with the manacles, and staggered back.

"Mah goodness!" he gasped. "What you doin' wif Mr. Jackson?"

"Which is Mr. Jackson?" asked Nick.

The darky indicated Featherfingers.

"Are you a servant in this house?" went on Nick.

"Yassuh, I 'tends de do' an' janitors around."

"Well, you can tell the owner of the place that he's about to lose Mr. Jackson. Is there a telephone in the house?"

"Yassuh."

"Chick," and Nick turned to his assistant, "send in a call to the nearest station for a detail of men to take care of Hummer and Mr. Jackson. I'll stay with them till you get back."

Chick turned away and left with the negro.

"Maybe we could have fixed this thing up some way, Carter," said Hummer.

"We'll fix it up in a few minutes," answered Nick, "and in the only way possible."

"Another wind-up," muttered Mr. Jackson. "I wonder if I'll ever learn to let well enough alone?"

Chick was back in a few minutes, and in fifteen minutes three officers tramped up the stairs and into the room.

"What's this?" demanded one, peering at the prisoners, and then at Nick.

The detective laughed.

"Don't you recognize your friends, Sullivan?" he asked.

The officer gave him a sharper look.

"Jehosaphat!" he exclaimed, the light breaking. "Why, it's Nick Carter."

The other two officers crowded in and displayed greater interest.

"I want you to take charge of those two prisoners, Sullivan," said Nick.

"We're taken without a warrant," bluffed Hummer. "We haven't done anything to deserve this high-handed treatment."

"As for that," laughed Nick, "they were taken red-handed. Look at this."

He reached out and plucked the fringe of whiskers from Hummer's face.

"Who's the man, Nick?" asked Sullivan, giving Hummer a hard look.

"Jim Senner, alias Hummer, alias I don't know what else. He's wanted, I think, for a Chicago job."

Sullivan gave a whoop.

"Wanted? I should say he was. Why, the whole department has been warned to keep a lookout for Nimble Jim. He and a pal cracked a Chicago bank last fall. The pal was sent up—ten years in Joliet—but Nimble Jim had on his skates."

"The department has been careless, Sullivan. Nimble Jim has been in New York for several days."

"One of the plain clothes men thought he saw him in an auction room on Twenty-third Street, the other day, but finally made up his mind he was mistaken."

"He wasn't mistaken. Nimble Jim was in the auction room, all right."

Jim Senner, at that, could not refrain from turning to Featherfingers.

"Now," said he, "you understand why I was leery of making a bid on that grip, and getting too much in the limelight."

Featherfingers merely swore under his breath.

"Who's the other?" asked Sullivan, his attention drawn to Featherfingers.

"He's the pal that helped Nimble Jim pull off that Chicago job. He broke away from Joliet after getting the best of one of the guards."

"I hadn't heard about that, Nick," said Sullivan, "but we've got a dead open and shut on Senner."

"We'll leave them with you, Sullivan," observed Nick, gathering in the brown bag from a corner of the room. "If you want me for anything you know where to find me. You'd better go through their clothes before you take them to the station. Hummer just turned over a thousand in cold cash to Featherfingers."

"Some of the swag from that bank job, I'll bet a farm," said Sullivan. "All right, Nick. If we want you we'll let you know."

Nick and Chick thereupon left the room, and made their way downstairs and out of the house.

Chick was laughing softly to himself as they started toward Madison Avenue.

"I thought Hummer had lost you, Nick," said he.

"Just what I thought Featherfingers had done with you," Nick answered.

Dawn was just breaking over the jagged skyline of the city when the two detectives climbed the steps to their home quarters. They were a little surprised to see a strange automobile at the curb; and they were still more surprised when they passed into the reception room.

Liedermann was there, walking up and down the room in a most deplorable state of mind; and Patsy was also there, keeping watch over Senner.

"Something new has turned up, chief," explained Patsy. "The professor was bound to come, and to bring Senner along with him."

"What's wrong, Professor Liedermann?" Nick asked.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ONYX CAMEO.

The Herr Professor was far gone with worry and excitement.

"Gott im Himmel, Mr. Carter," he groaned, tossing his arms, "I am ruined."

"Oh, it can't be so bad as that," said Nick, soothingly.

"It is worse, it is much worse!" insisted Liedermann. He flung up his hands in a sudden access of despair. "The onyx cameo, the beautiful, the rare, it is gone! It was intrusted to me, and I have been false to the trust!"

"Onyx cameo?" repeated Nick.

"So!" went on Liedermann thickly. "It would be better that I had died before this great trouble came upon me. I am old, and I might have been spared this disgrace, this dishonor! So soon as I discovered my loss, I came to you. You had been to see me, Mr. Carter, and you had asked strange questions, questions that I could not understand. I had a forlorn hope. If you cannot help me, to whom can I go? Lieber Gott, what a condition for me to be in, at my age, and with my honorable reputation. I had sooner die."

"Sit down, professor," said Nick. "Calm yourself, and tell me what has happened. Be as plain and succinct as you can."

The brown bag had no hold on the professor's attention. He saw it without emotion as Nick set it down on the floor.

"Perhaps you recall, Mr. Carter," said Liedermann, calming himself with an effort and taking a chair, "that I showed you my strong room and some of the treasures I have stored there?"

"I recall it perfectly, professor."

"Do you also recall the great treasure I spoke about, but which, from considerations of duty to my wealthy patron, I did not show you?"

"Yes."

"That treasure, Mr. Carter, was the onyx cameo, a most rare antique, which has come down to us from the Crusades. It is in two layers, this cameo. The upper part has allegorical figures representing the coronation of Augustus—oh, most rare, most beautiful, positively genuine and unique! On the exergue are Roman soldiers, preparing a trophy, and other figures. So delicate, so fine it is, that twelve thousand

golden ducats were paid down for it in the sixteenth century."

The professor paused to beat his breast. Thoughts of the cameo brought back to him the extent of the loss.

"Cheer up, professor," admonished Nick. "I think I can help you. The owner of the cameo, I believe you told me, went abroad and left the cameo in your care?"

"Yes, yes, in my care. And I have proved faithless to my trust! I——"

"Was the man's name Jason Pedwell?"

"I did not tell you that! How did you know?"

"Never mind that part of it just now, professor. The cameo has been stolen?"

"Yes."

"What caused you to look for it when you made the discovery?"

"This," and the professor handed the detective a telegram.

The telegram was from Chicago, and was signed by Professor Gunyon, the eminent Egyptologist:

"Mummy's head not received. Hope you will forward soon as possible."

"When did you receive this?" Nick asked, returning the message.

"The evening of the day you called," answered the professor. "That will be yesterday now, for it is already day. What a night I have spent. It has seemed like a black year of trouble."

"What did you do when you received the message?"

"I called up the express company on the telephone, and I told them I had given the hatbox into the hands of their agent myself. So I knew it. They answered, in an hour, that they had no record of such a shipment, so could not trace it. Well, that was the head of Senbtes, itself rare and of great value because of the delta scar. But it was as nothing compared with the other loss I was soon to discover.

"This about the head of Senbtes worried me. I thought of my conversation with you, and, alarmed and urged on by a feeling of greater disaster, I went into the strong room, opened the drawer where I had placed the onyx cameo, and—and——"

He paused. The poor old fellow's sorrow was so deep that Nick, out of pity, urged him on to the end. But the detective, while seeking to hasten the professor's recital, wanted every salient point of it.

"And then?" said Nick.

"When I came to myself I was lying on the floor of the strong room. I had swooned. When I recovered my senses, I staggered to my desk and sat down to think. Then, once more, occurred to me my conversation with you, and what happened while you were here. Senner had cast Bubastes loose, he had tried to close you and me in the strong room so he could go away.

"All this, I reason, might have something to do with the cameo. I went to the anteroom where your assistant was keeping watch of my clerk. My plight must have awakened remorse in Senner, for he told me all, all. In despair, Mr. Carter, I insisted that your assistant should come with me and bring Senner. He shall tell you what he told me. Perhaps it will help you to help me in my trouble."

Liedermann turned in his chair and faced the clerk.

"Speak!" he cried, waving his hand.

"I—I helped steal the cameo," said Senner.

"Why did you do that?" demanded Nick sternly. "Liedermann had always been your friend?"

"Always. But I did it to—to help my brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. He is a fugitive from justice. He wanted to get away to some foreign country and make a new start. He pleaded with me, and I helped steal the cameo."

"How could your brother hope to profit by such a theft, Senner? Such a priceless relic as this cameo could not be disposed of without bringing your brother under suspicion."

Senner, with a furtive glance at the hollow-eyed professor, moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"He was not going to dispose of it," he went on, "not in the way you mean. Jason Pedwell is a multimillionaire. Collecting antiques is a hobby of his. The gem of his collection was the onyx cameo, and he paid down a fortune for it. It was my brother's intention to demand a ransom for the cameo—fifty thousand dollars, I think."

Chick laughed.

"A nice way to get a start in an honest career!" he exclaimed.

"I suppose," pursued Nick, "you told your brother about the cameo having been turned over to Liedermann?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure, Senner, that you did not suggest to your brother the plan of taking the cameo to Europe and making Pedwell come down handsomely for it?"

A look of horror suffused Senner's pallid face.

"No, no!" he cried. "It was my brother who suggested that. I told him I could not help him, that the professor kept the cameo in his strong room, and allowed no one to enter the room but himself. The professor had told me how he was guarding the gem, and I even knew in what drawer he kept it. For days I tried to get the combination of the strong-room door. My brother showed me how to pare my finger nails to the quick, to put the tips of my fingers on the knob of the combination, and to feel the fall of the tumblers. But it was impossible. I was on the point of giving up when the request came from Professor Gunyon for the head of Senbtes. Then I saw my chance."

"Your brother was coming to the Egyptian Building right along and talking with you?" asked Nick.

"He came by night, and I let him in."

"Why did not he try his hand at the combination?"

"Bubastes was loose in the large room—he did not dare enter it."

"But you could have quieted Bubastes. You have the same power over the big cat that the professor has."

"Not the same. In daylight I can handle the brute, but at night it is as much as my life is worth to go into the big room."

"Then it appears," said Nick dryly, "that Bubastes was of some use to the professor, even against yourself, Senner."

"When my brother heard about the head he developed a plan," went on Senner. "I was sure the professor would pack the head of Senbtes in the strong room. He would not bring it out where any other eyes than his own could see it. The packing was done the day after he got the request from Professor Gunyon. While it was going on, I telephoned my brother; then I called the professor and told him some one wanted to talk with him. He told me to have them call up again, but I said it was an important call, and must be answered at once. When he passed out of the room he did not see me. I slipped back to the red curtain, and found that the door of the strong room had been left open. The hatbox was there, and the mummy's head, wrapped in a cloth. I —I——"

Senner looked at the professor again, and paused.

"Go on!" thundered Liedermann, "give us the whole of your iniquity, man!"

"I opened the drawer," proceeded Senner, in a low voice, "removed the cameo and pushed it under a bandage at the back of the head. I was only a moment. Then I went out and was at the door when the professor came back. He never noticed—I doubt if he unwrapped the cloth from the mummy's head——"

"Such villainy!" mourned the professor. "I gave the box to one who was not an expressman, but a confederate of Senner's brother. And now—it is gone."

Nick picked up the brown grip.

"Look in that, professor," said he, "but don't be discouraged."

The professor, under the wondering eyes of Senner, took the bag on his knees, opened it and removed the paper-wrapped object inside.

A cry of joy escaped him when the head of the mummy was revealed to his eyes; but it was followed by a cry of despair when his trembling fingers failed to find what they were groping for.

Nick got up and dropped a friendly hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Don't be discouraged, professor," he repeated. "Wait."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE THIN PACKET.

"What has become of the Pedwell cameo?" Liedermann flung at Senner hoarsely. "You said it was here, and it is not here! Have you lied to me? Did you secrete the cameo elsewhere?"

The professor bounded to his feet, dropping the bag, but holding the gruesome relic in his left arm.

"Speak!" he cried, standing over Senner with his right fist lifted.

Nick hastened to interfere.

"Softly, professor, softly!" he cautioned, and took Liedermann by the arm and conducted him back to his chair. "I know that Senner has told the truth," he went on, when the professor was seated again. "I can assure you of that. If you will look closely, you will see where the cameo has been under the bandage."

Liedermann adjusted his glasses and looked close.

"It is so," said he wearily. "It is as you say, Mr. Carter. But where did you recover this?"

"It came into my hands last night," and Nick regaled the professor with the story of Darrel Blenkyn and the red-faced man.

The professor was vastly interested.

"That is wonderful," he breathed, "that is romantic. What more, Mr. Carter? Please go forward."

Nick went "forward," and told of the coming of the red-faced man to his house, of his story, part true and part false, and of his giving the brown bag and the relic to the supposed detective.

"The cameo was not with the head then?" asked Liedermann.

"No. In its place was a note," and Nick repeated the contents of the note from memory.

"I gave the bag and its contents to Hummer so he would find the note, professor," he explained. "That, you see, would enable me to be at Madison Square at midnight and follow the plotters. Ultimately, you understand, I hoped to find their loot, although at that time I did not know what the loot consisted of."

"Fine!" breathed the Herr Professor. "Most remarkable. Mr. Carter, allow me to say it, you are a wonderful man."

"Thank you," laughed Nick. "When I called on you, yesterday morning, I was very much in the dark myself. You did not know you had been victimized, and I could not give you any information of much value, so I kept what I knew to myself. Senner, in his anxiety to save his liberty, gave himself away."

From that point, Nick followed down to what had transpired in the room. He did not relate all of it, but he came to the thin packet.

Liedermann's excitement and hope had been growing.

"I have not looked at the contents of the packet, professor," said Nick. "I only know that it passed muster with Jim Senner, your clerk's brother, and I am fairly certain, therefore, that it contains your missing property. That is for you to say."

With that, Nick took the packet from his pocket and handed it to Liedermann.

The old German was trembling in every limb. He scarcely breathed while he unwrapped the newspaper covering. The next moment he was on his feet and bubbling over with joy.

"Gott sei dank!" he quavered. "It is it, it is! Lieber freund, you have saved my old head from coming in sorrow to the grave. What I owe you I can never repay. Mr. Carter——"

There were tears in the old man's eyes. Stepping over to where Nick was standing, he embraced him.

"Ask of me whatever I have," he finished. "I give it to you freely."

There was something pathetic in the professor's gratitude. Nick took his hand cordially.

"Liedermann," said he, "I went into this haphazard, without knowing where it would land me. It was one of the strangest cases that ever commanded my attention, for the simple reason that, up to last night in the quarters of Featherfingers, my assistant and I were working toward the unknown. There was an interest in this for me that I do not have in many of my cases. If you are satisfied, my friend, I am."

"It shall not be so!" decared Liedermann. "I can pay, and pay well. Had that scoundrel succeeded, and made claim of fifty thousand dollars upon Jason Pedwell, it would have been my part to return to him the full amount. But the ignominy, the dishonor of having been false to my trust, would have clung to me until my last day. I am to thank you for saving me."

"We have accomplished something apart from recovering the fragment of the mummy and the cameo," said Nick. "Jim Senner and Featherfingers are now in custody. Senner will be tried for that Chicago crime, and Featherfingers will go back to the penitentiary from which he escaped. This is a great deal, and a source of much gratification to me."

"I shall pay, I shall pay," mumbled the professor, hugging the cameo to his heart with one hand. "Ask of me what you will. My choicest carvings, anything. Speak."

Nick laughed good-naturedly.

"I am neither an Egyptologist nor an antiquarian," said Nick, "but if you are bound to give me something, send over that crocodile desk to stand in this reception room."

"It will come this afternoon," declared the professor, "but that is not all. My obligation to you is not repaid. I shall do something later, my friend."

"The question arises as to what you will do with your clerk," went on Nick. "He is neither a fugitive nor a prison breaker; but he has been guilty of a crime, nevertheless."

Liedermann, now that he had recovered the stolen property, looked at the bowed form of his clerk with softened eyes.

"Lieber Gott," said he, "how can I be hard on him? He has worked for me faithfully these three years, and never before has he done a dishonorable thing. To be stern with him now might start him in the way of his graceless brother."

"You mean," said Nick, "that you will let him go?"

"There is the sordid side, the mercenary side to it, also," returned Liedermann. "Nothing of this need ever be spoken. This Featherfingers, as you call him, will merely be sent back to prison, and Jim Senner will be brought to the bar of justice for that crime committed in Chicago; but my clerk, if he is harshly dealt with, must be tried for the theft of the cameo. I could not suffer it to come out. Do you not see, Mr. Carter?"

"Your position is well taken," said Nick quietly.

He motioned to Patsy, and Patsy removed the handcuffs.

Senner, with a cry of gratitude, threw himself on his knees at the professor's feet. He caught his hand and pressed it.

"It is sufficient, Senner," said Liedermann. "Have you money?"

"No," was the smothered reply.

"What have you done with your salary, Senner?"

"It has gone to support the old mother, over in Jersey."

Which, Nick reasoned, might be true or merely a yarn to win Liedermann's sympathy. The simple, old professor gave his sympathy, and offered it in substantial form.

"Come to me at the society," said he, "and I will not let you go from my employ empty-handed."

Senner got up, took his hat, and made for the door. Patsy showed him out.

Joseph appeared from the rear of the house.

"Breakfast, Nick," said he.

"Will you join us, professor?" asked Nick.

"Not now, my friend," answered Liedermann, "but some other time you shall eat with me. Five dollars an hour I have been paying that motor car in front since four this morning. Himmel, I shall be bankrupt!"

With the cameo and the fragment of the mummy in the brown bag, the Herr Professor started for the door. He shook both Nick's hands at parting, and the detective watched him climb into the car and drive happily away.

"Now for a cold plunge," said Nick to Chick, "and then breakfast."

THE END.

A great source of wonder lies in the apparent defiance of death of some of the great soldiers, explorers, and detectives of the world. And another source of wonder is the narrow margin by which many of them repeatedly escape death. In the next issue, No. 729, you will read how Nick Carter almost came back from the grave. Two of his cleverest enemies were satisfied that they had him "extinguished" for all time, but they reckoned without Chick and Patsy and a few amazing stunts pulled off by those shrewd assistants. The story is called "The Statue Clue; or, Nick Carter and the Rylman Riddle." It's one of the keenest stories that has appeared for a long time. Don't miss it. Out next week.

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HOW LARS MADE GOOD HIS CLAIM.

Frithiof Norsen and his son Lars were looking for a "quarter section" of land on the great prairie. He, Norsen, had already picked out one, earlier in the year, toward which they were now making their way, while keeping a sharp lookout for anything better.

They drove on slowly toward a blue line in the west, which indicated a growth of wood, perhaps along some stream. Late in the afternoon they drew near to the trees.

There was a deep ravine, thickly wooded on the sides, and beautiful in the soft light of the June afternoon, and in its shady depths, half hidden by the foliage, an angry little stream went splashing over the rocks.

"Ofer there," said Norsen, standing up in the wagon and pointing across the ravine to a level and sunny upland; "ofer there it shall be fery good soil. That is the quarters I haf picked out. It are better as anything we haf seen. We shall go ofer and look at it."

"But shall we not eat some of that ham first?" asked Lars.

"Yes, so we shall, we shall haf a good fire, and shall eat some ham an' cracker, an' then we shall find a place where those mules shall go down to the rifer, without to stumble and break their necks."

When the supper had been eaten they led the mules slowly down to the river, and then up north a little way to where Norsen had found what looked like a good ford.

But alas! for his best calculations! The rapid little stream rushed and splashed over the rocks and whirled among the spokes of the wheels. Norsen was driving, and Lars was holding on for dear life, as first one side of the wagon would rise over a hidden rock and then the other. All at once the wheels on one side rose so high that it seemed as if the wagon must go over. Lars and his father sprang to the upper side to keep it from tilting, when, as suddenly, down it came, and, instead of resting on the same level as the other, sank a couple of feet into a hole.

The wagon, weighted down on that side, turned half over, the rushing water carried across it, and Lars was thrown out. He climbed up on a projecting rock, dripping wet, while his father succeeded in staying in the wagon and urging the mules to pull it free.

When Lars had been rescued and the farther bank had been reached, he looked down at the wagon box and then up at his father.

"Father," said he, "where is that ham?"

Sure enough. Where was it? And the crackers and the molasses, too? The plow was the only thing left, and they certainly could never eat a plow.

They sat down in their dripping clothes on the river bank and gazed at each other.

"There is onerly one thing," said Norsen, after a while. "I shall walk to those next town. I am sure I shall find it. I haf been there from here. But I shall rather walk as drife those mules ofer those rough road, an' across that rifers some more. I shall to come back to-morrow."

"And now come with me to that top of the rifer bank, and I shall show you those corners of this quarter," he continued. "You shall be fery careful that no one shall jump onto this quarter while I shall be gone, and I shall be back fery soon with plenty of somethings to eat."

So to the top of the rising land they went. The ascent was less sudden and less stony than on the other side, and nearly all of the quarter above lay flat and stoneless.

"Shall you see that one big, lonesome tree without some leaves on it? Well, those section stake are yust there. And then you shall see that high lump of grounds piled up there?"

Lars nodded.

"That are a quarter stake; and when you shall stand there, and look ofer straight to the rifer, you shall see a open place and not any trees. That are the third corner of the quarter."

Lars nodded again.

"And down here, where we shall been comed ashore, that are those last corner. Now, shall you rembmber those four corners of this quarter sections?"

"Yes, I shall remember it so that I can walk all around it in the dark," said Lars.

Then his father went away toward the south, and left the boy alone.

Lars went back to the mules, and tethered them where they could browse in a grassy little spot near the water.

After this was done he went up the gentle slope again, and although he was very tired, he walked slowly over toward the "lonesome tree," the leafless upper branches of which were now lighted with the glow of the setting sun. To the north, the mound in which the quarter stake was planted "loomed" very clear against the sky. Lars thought he had the "lay" of the quarter well in mind.

When he came back to the beginning of the descent, he sat down in the midst of a little cluster of trees where it seemed very cool, and leaned his head against one of the trunks. Before he had time to wink he was asleep.

He was awakened by the sound of voices near by. Two men were standing just beyond the clump of trees where he sat. It was a dark night, but he could see that one of them was very tall.

"This is the quarter," said the tall man, whose voice indicated that he was rather old. "I've been over every inch of it, and it's a daisy. I happen to know all about the railroad survey, too. It's coming within two miles of here, sure. There, can't you see a tall tree clear over there against the sky?"

"Yes," said the other; "it's pretty dark, but I think I see it."

"Well, that's the southwest corner. Then it swings off to the north, and then round to the river again. Right down below us is the fourth corner. Want to go down?"

Lars' heart went up in his mouth. If they went down, they would certainly find the mules and wagon.

"No," said the other. "I guess not now. Nobody'll jump the claim between now and to-morrow morning. We can go back to our shanty, and then strike in here early and begin breaking.'"

"Well," said the old man, "just as you say. But you know the risk you run. The man that begins improvements on this quarter first, has it. There'll be a big rush for this land, now the survey's finished. If we should bring over the plow, and run it round, we'd be all right. But if we wait till morning, somebody may get in ahead of us."

"I'll take the risk of that," said the younger man, laughing. "Nobody'll be here to-night. Come on."

Lars sat quite still for some time after the sound of their footsteps had died away. Then very quietly he slipped down to the river. The mules were lying down, but rose as they saw him coming, and in a few minutes he had them harnessed to the wagon.

Then he sat down and waited. Perhaps half an hour passed before he stirred, for he was afraid the men might still be near.

But at last he took the reins, and urged the mules slowly up the ascent. The wheels rattled outrageously. But it was not long before the higher level was reached. To get the plow from the wagon was the next thing. After pulling and tugging and spending nearly all his strength, down it came to the ground.

The mules were hitched to it, and they started away. He drove them first quite a piece to the north, and then started across the quarter to a point well to the north of the lonesome tree, so as to bring the plowed line well within the quarter section, and to run no risk of having it on some other "claim."

Lars had plowed for his father on their farm Down East, but this "breaking" was different work. The sod was tough. Now and then a stone threw the plow out. The mules were sleepy and cross, and he himself felt completely tired out.

But on they went. When they came up near to the tree, Lars had to lie down on the ground to see the quarter-stake mound to the north, against the sky. Northward the plow was turned, and the mules were headed well within the line again. It was so dark that several times Lars had to lie down to see the mound, but by and by they came up to it. Then he struck off easterly for the clearing by the river, which showed up plainly against the sky.

He did not go clear down to the verge of the bank, but while still a good way short of it, turned away toward the starting point as best he could judge.

He was so sleepy he could hardly hold onto the plow, and hungry, too, but on he went, now and then speaking a word to encourage the mules, until at last they struck their first furrow.

He had girdled the quarter. He had put the first improvements on the land. He had saved the claim.

On the way back to the beginning of this first furrow he turned over another, beside it; unhitched the mules, and tied them to the wagon wheels, and crawled into the wagon, half dead with sleep.

A pale light was just stealing up into the sky in the east.

"I shall have to keep—awake—and watch—for—those ——," said Lars sleepily, and the next moment he was dead asleep.

But he woke suddenly, and found himself listening to the voices again. There was the tall man, and the other man, and his father all talking very loud and very earnestly.

Norsen had found provisions at a house about a dozen miles to the south. He had stayed there to get a few hours' sleep, and then had come back in time to bring Lars his breakfast.

"But the claim is mine," said the tall man.

Lars sat up in the wagon.

"Whoever puts the first improvements on the land shall have the claim," he said, quoting the tall man's words.

"Did you do this plowing?" asked the man.

"And the mules," said Lars.

There was nothing in the world that the tall man could do about it, so he and his companion went away at last.

Norsen couldn't help laughing whenever he looked at the plowing. But it had saved the quarter section.

ANTS THAT MARCH AND FIGHT.

All the wonders of Tropical Africa have not yet been made known to white people.

Year by year some fresh fact of the greatest interest comes to light; sometimes it is about a new bird, sometimes a new animal, but some of the most interesting of all relate to the smallest creatures.

The white ants and their doings are pretty well known—the damage they do, and the safeguards that have to be used against them. Not quite so well known are the "driver" ants.

In an extremely interesting letter from the Soudan contributed last July to the *Spectator* by a correspondent who signs himself "Another Rifleman in Africa," some further facts are made known about ants which our readers may like to have.

He says: "When we come to consider the small things of Africa, there is hardly anything more wonderful than the ants. It may very well be said that no one is without his ant in Africa. Sit down for a moment and you will see an ant, if you have not already sat down upon one. Ants abound everywhere, and in this particular neighborhood there are at least seven different species, the majority of which are visible daily. Each species wages war with the others—a war of extermination to the weaker side.

"Among these seven species of ants, and possibly supreme in the ant world, are the 'driver' or 'raiding' ants. They are great in numbers, often large in size, and ferocious; a nuisance, if not a danger, to all; formidable pests afraid of nothing living, going their way disliked and avoided by all, and only to be turned aside or got rid of by fire.

"Their numbers are so great that their columns may spread for miles, like the transport train of a moderate-sized army. It is no uncommon thing for a single column to take several hours to pass a given spot; the pace set is steady, and, where the checks are few, attains to half a mile an hour and over. The width of these columns varies from a quarter to half an inch, and distinct tracks are visible where these ants have passed.

"In broken or uneven ground tunnels are pierced, and at the crossings of native paths or other open spaces the warriors are told off to guard the edge of the line of march, quite as much to press forward their friends over the dangerous spot as to be alert and ready to dash out and attack any disturber, man or beast. These attacks are carried out without a moment's hesitation, with the formidable nippers held wide open.

"So well are the ants known and dreaded that donkeys and other pack animals will turn off the path into the bush in preference to stepping over this irascible enemy.

"In the opposite scale, the scale of peace, must be placed the 'white' ants, which should not properly be included under the heading of ants. These ants are found everywhere, destroying always, preferring to carry out their evil deeds in the dark of night. This is well known to all; but it is equally well known that they utter a distinct twitter when disturbed or when alarmed in their homes, so making known the necessity of immediate flight.

"Among ordinary travelers it is common to think that white ants do not bite, possibly because they are better known as eaters of carpets, mats, wood, dry leaves, and clothing; but this is not the case, as the large brown-headed white ant of the ant heap is provided by nature with a pair of formidable nippers, both for common use and for purposes of defense. If disturbed it does not hesitate to use these, and it is an unpleasant surprise to receive so severe a bite from such an innocent-looking creature.

"The nippers of a white ant cut the skin like the sharpest razor, at once drawing blood; in fact, had these ants been born as pugnacious as the driver ant large tracts of Africa would not be inhabited to-day."

Museum Proprietor—"What's wrong with our new midget. He doesn't seem to draw."

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